

## Lizzie (Macnichol) Reitz

( - 1899)

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*The Washington Post, April 18, 1887, p. 2*

### **A Washington Singer**

#### **A Correspondent Tells of Her Successful Debut in New York**

A New York correspondent of The Post records the unqualified success of Miss Lizzie Macnichol, a Washington singer, at Emilio Agramonte's seventeenth annual concert last Tuesday evening. Miss Macnichol was the debutante of the evening, the other participants being professional singers of more or less note or older pupils of the impressario, and already known to the public. The debutante labored under the disadvantage of being placed near the end of a long programme, and of being entirely without a backing of any kind in the audience. The applause at the end of her song, however, was the heartiest of the evening. The performance created, in fact, a genuine enthusiasm, which was probably all the greater because of the surprise. The lady's success was of a pronounced and indubitable kind, and it is entirely safe to assert that Miss Macnichol can have as many concert engagements next winter as she chooses to accept.

Miss Macnichol's voice is a pure contralto of unusual range and power. Her style of singing is at the widest possible remove from the commonplace and displays a thoroughly artistic training. She was formerly a pupil of Dr. E.S. Kimball, of Washington, but came to New York last fall to enter Mr. Agramonte's classes. Beginning on the 1st of May she will sing as solo contralto in the quartette choir at Dr. Chapin's old church, Forty-fifth street.

*The Washington Post, March 24, 1888, p. 3*

### **City Personals**

Miss Lizzie Macnichol, who left the city a little more than a year ago to pursue her musical studies in New York, scored a most gratifying success at the annual concert of her teacher, Mr. E. Agramonti,, at Chickering Hall last Wednesday evening. She sang Meyerbeer's "Ministri di Baal," and the critical audience exhibited its appreciation of the rendition by continued applause. Miss Macnichol was a former pupil of Dr. E.S. Kimball, of this city.

*The Washington Post, June 4, 1888, p. 1*

### **A Washington Girl's Debut**

Miss Lizzie Macnichol, of this city, who is so well-known in musical circles here, made a successful debut in opera last Friday night at the new North Broad-Street Opera House, Philadelphia. She sang the role of Lazarillo in "Maritana" and the Telegraph of that city thus favorably speaks of her performance: The young prima donna was very heartily received in the first instance, a ringing round greeting her entry in the second scene, her role being that of Lazarillo. In the second act her first aria, "The Mansions of the Blest," at once established her place high in the favor of the audience, their appreciation of her merit being attested by a double encore most sincerely and enthusiastically given. She discovered a contralto voice of rare sweetness and sustained power and sang with excellent method and just conception of the music. She has the advantage of an unusually wide register and in every section of her scale her voice is full, round and melodious. Miss Macnichol is a very valuable addition to the new American Opera Company and bids fair to attain fame and position as a contralto of the first order in her department.

*The Washington Post, April 21, 1889, p. 6*

### **Albaugh's Opera House**

An interesting performance of the popular opera, "The Bohemian Girl," was given last to a good house by the New American Opera Company, Mr. Vetta appearing as Count Arnheim, Mr. Castle as Thadddeus, Mr. Knight as Devilshoff, Alvia Verena as Arline, and Lizzie MacNichol as the Gypsy Queen. The merry gypsy chorus was fairly rendered, Miss Verena and Miss MacNichol were encored in two of their solos, and Mr. Vetta's superb delivery of "The Heart Bow'd Down," received an enthusiastic recall. At points, however, the performance lacked spirit and confidence.

*The Evening Star, August 14, 1899, p. 3*

### **To Be Buried Here**

#### **Remains of Lizzie Macnichol to Be Brought to This City**

#### **Funeral From Her Father's House Tomorrow--**

#### **Sketch of Her Operatic Career**

Lizzie Macnichol, whose reputation as an opera singer is national and whose former home was in this city, died Saturday evening at 7:30 o'clock at Chocorna, N.H., of peritonitis. No aspirant for honors on the operatic stage ever won more friends and inspired more love for her womanly and generous traits of character than Miss Macnichol, who was especially well known in this city, where she was born and reared. Although always retaining her maiden name on the stage, she was married to Mr. Charles Louis Reitz, a merchant of Baltimore and an amateur musician.

#### *Rapid Development of Disease*

Miss Macnichol was never in more perfect health than she was a few days before her death. This morning her parents, who live at 105 C street southeast, received a letter from her husband, which was written last Thursday evening, saying that his wife was not feeling well. There was no thought that her illness was at all dangerous at that time. But she developed peritonitis, and on Saturday morning word was received here by telegraph that she was critically ill. She grew worse steadily until evening, when she died. She had been at Chocorna for some weeks, and since her stay there had enjoyed several mountain trips with her husband, and her family here suppose she contracted the disease that resulted fatally through overexertion in this way last week.

#### *A Heroine at a Fire*

A short time before her illness Miss Macnichol had played a heroic part on the occasion of the burning of the new home of the Runnells family, near Chocorna. This elegant mansion had been fitted up at great expense, and at the time only the family servants were there. The alarm of fire reached the hotel in which Miss Macnichol was stopping, and she and her husband at once repaired to the scene of the disaster to render whatever assistance was in their power. Miss Macnichol showed great presence of mind during the conflagration, and largely through her direction and personal efforts much of the valuable contents of the house was saved from the flames. She became the village heroine on that occasion. While some reports from Chocorna trace her illness from the excitement on the day of the fire, her family here do not believe it was in any way connected with the disease which later developed. It was with the greatest regret that the news of Miss Macnichol's death was received here, where she had lived since her childhood. Her talent and beauty of person and character had endeared her to an unusually large circle of friends.

### *Her Musical Career*

Early in life she gave evidence of having a contralto voice of remarkable sweetness and of unusual scope. Her musical training was begun under the direction of Dr. Kimball. She sang at different times in many of the churches of this city and later filled an engagement in one of the Brooklyn churches in order that she might be under the tuition of Sig. Agramonte. She then went to Philadelphia, where she made her debut in the part of Lazarillo in "Maritana," at the Grand Opera House. This was in 1888, and was her first appearance in opera, and, although entirely new to the stage, she achieved an immediate and pronounced success. This engagement was with the American Opera Company, with which she continued for some time. In 1890 she joined the Emma Juch Opera Company and was with it during three seasons. She then joined the Hinrichs Opera Company and played a summer engagement in Philadelphia and New York.

### *Her Success in Opera*

Her success in heavy opera was signal and her ambition led her to devote her time to the highest class of music, for which her natural talents and education fitted her. The public demand for light opera and attractive offers she received for such engagements caused her, in 1894 to make her appearance in "Rob Roy" as Flora MacDonald, in which she won decided success. She next came here with the Grau Metropolitan English Opera Company, and later joined the Castle Square Opera Company. Her popularity contributed very largely to the success of that operatic organization. When the company appeared here at the Lafayette Opera House and the Columbia Theater she was the drawing attraction that guaranteed well-filled houses at all times.

Miss Macnichol's first husband was Franz Vetta, the well-known Quaker basso, who died five years ago. Three years later the widow married Chas. Louis Reitz of Baltimore, who had been with her in the north since her engagement was closed for the summer.

Her father, mother, five brothers and two sisters reside in this city, her death being the first that has occurred in her immediate family.

There are many incidents that indicate the sympathetic and generous nature of the deceased opera singer, who appears never to have been appealed to in vain. She was noted for her acts of kindness to struggling opera singers, and was as popular among the chorus as among the managers.

### *To Be Buried Here*

The remains of Miss Macnichol will be brought to this city tomorrow morning, and the funeral will take place at 4 o'clock from her parents' home, 105 C street northeast. The interment will be in the Congressional cemetery, and will be private.

*The Washington Post, August 20, 1899, p. 24*

### **Theatrical News and Gossip**

The sickle of the grim reaper cut a wide swath in theatrical circles last week, but nowhere did it cut sharper into the affections of Washington people and playgoers than when it cut off Lizzie MacNichol in her prime. Even those who did not know her personally regard the untimely demise of this popular songstress in the light of a personal bereavement, so how much more heavily must it fall on her many friends and relatives, who recall her in her preprofessional days as the contralto soloist of the choir at old St. Matthew's Church. It was strange that a daughter of a stern old Scotch Presbyterian line should adopt the stage, but such was her natural talent that she was practically forced onto the boards by her enthusiastic music masters and admirers, and it would be a good thing for the stage if more like her would follow her example.

Miss Macnichol's professional career is sufficiently well known in Washington, even if it had not been recalled by obituary notices. She was a success from the start, her beautiful voice, fine presence, pretty face, and charming manners serving to put her at once into favor with an audience. But there was something more than mere vocal attainments and physical beauty about Lizzie Macnichol which made her a universal favorite. She carried about her what the mystics might call an "aura" of good humor, refinement, and heartiness that seemed to reach over the footlights and impress every auditor with the idea that here was a true, warm-hearted woman. This impression was correct. She was universally popular with every company with which she had been associated on account of her kind heart, her cheery manner, and the charity with which she received all. There was none of the Pharisee about Lizzie Macnichol, yet while she never felt called upon to pose in the Mrs. Kendal class as the model of stage morals and deportment, there was never in her whole career the slightest cause for connecting her name with scandal.

Still she never felt the necessity of drawing herself aside to escape contamination by those of her professional associates whose private lives were not so unimpeachable. Consequently she was beloved by all, and doubtless did more good by example than any number of preachers. By the members of the Castle Square Company she was fairly worshiped, since from the depths of her experience she was always ready to give advice and assistance to younger singers, whose successes she rejoiced in with an unselfish sincerity that made her all the more beloved. Although she had suffered bitter bereavement, she did not wear her weeds in public, nor cast a gloom over her company. She was always cheery, apparently light-hearted, and enjoyed a joke on as well as off the stage. An excellent comedienne, as well as a sterling singer, she often took the cue from the comedians, and indulged in a bit of impromptu fun-making, which while always in good taste, gave an atmosphere of freshness and spontaneity to some of the time-worn old comic operas in which the company won its principal Washington successes. In New York the craze was for standard and grand opera, in which Miss Macnichol was thoroughly at home, while as Carmen she won even stellar honors.

Concerning her first appearance in this role, there is an interesting little story told by Albert Walmsley, who was press agent of the Castle Square company at that time. Miss Macnichol was accustomed to wear a little locket, in which were the portraits of her deceased husband, Franz Vetta, and her little baby, who died shortly afterward. Just before the curtain rose the Don Jose of the company found the new Carmen in her dressing-room, dissolved in tears. The locket in her hand told the tale. She wanted to wear it, yet somehow her artistic soul revolted at the idea of carrying this sacred relic as the wanton of Seville. So for the first time she laid it aside, but at her request it was buried with her. The writer will always remember her as she sat in her dressing-room at the National theater one night during the engagement of "Rob Roy." She was costumed for the part of Flora Macdonald which became her wonderfully well, for she was Scotch and proud of it, carrying with her a little handkerchief of the original Macnichol plaid. Still this heroine of the opera was sitting quietly in her room, working on a bit of dainty embroidery, which was at once her passion and her diversion, calmly waiting for her cue and regardless of the tinsel show all about her. It was a little bit of domesticity that illustrated the character of the actress – one who would be under all conditions and circumstances the simple old-fashioned woman, turning her hand to whatever was necessary and preserving her love of home amid her wandering life. As remarked before, it would be better for the stage if more recruits like Lizzie Macnichol would throng upon the boards.