

Why not a Public Memorial to Joseph O'Mara ?

OPERATIC TENOR WHO WON WORLD FAME

RECORDS MADE BY O'MARA ARE VALUABLE!

THIS month marks the 40th anniversary of the death of the great operatic tenor and actor, Joseph O'Mara. And the occasion reminds us that, after such a long span of years, there is no public memorial to him in his native city, Limerick, in fact, has been to a remarkable degree neglectful of some of its famous sons and daughters: Catherine Hayes and Ada Rhan were, respectively, the greatest soprano and the greatest Shakespearean actress of the day, and O'Mara had no peer as a singing actor. Perhaps the Limerick Choral & Operatic Society will mark the opening of their Festival this year by unveiling a plaque to the memory of O'Mara at, say, Ozanam House, where the great artiste resided for some time?

concert platform in Limerick was at the Dominican Septucentenary concerts at the Lyric in March, 1927.

He was, after an absence from the city of some years, accorded an unbounded reception for his beautiful selections which he rendered with his wonted taste and power.

O'Mara's stage career was long and popular. The secret of his success was aptly summed up by a contemporary—"He made a good name at the outset and maintained it to the close. No other operatic artiste of his time had sung so many parts and sung them all so uniformly well. If one could analyse his

art, its secret might be found in the fit wedding of dramatic portraiture and vocal excellence. Joseph O'Mara was that rarely gifted thing—an all-round artiste. He was as happy in a Wagner masterpiece as in the lighter phases of a lyric work. And he achieved what few among contemporary operatic tenors have achieved—competent success upon the concert platform. An Irish air, an English or a Scottish ballad, found in him a master of simplicity. The sentiment was never strained. He sang the music and the words so well because he felt them in his heart.

All recordings made by Joseph O'Mara are collectors' pieces and some may be worth anything up to £100. Among the more valuable are "Ochone, When I Used To Be Young" from "Seamus O'Brien" and "Friend and Lover" by Sir Landon Ronald. It is more than probable that some of these discs may be unrecognised in collections of old records in Limerick. A look in the lumber room may pay good dividends!

Joseph O'Mara was born on July 18, 1866, son of James O'Mara, the founder of the well-known bacon curing firm of O'Mara Ltd., and brother of the patriot Senator, Stephen O'Mara.

He had an outstanding—indeed remarkable—career in the musical profession. As a tenor of rare quality he sang himself into fame at an early age.

He studied first with J. F. Murray of this city and later with Professor Gmur of Cork, and one of his first appearances as a professional was in the old Theatre Royal of his native city. He was also immediately successful in Cork.

In 1889 he went to Milan, where he studied for a few years under famous teachers. Progressing rapidly, he was encouraged to make an appearance in London.

His tour in Ireland with Sir Augustus Harris's company was a triumphant success, and he returned to England as an established favourite.

Extending his surprising energy into the English concert world which was then occupied by more famous singers than at any time before or since, he achieved further success, and enjoyed the distinction of having several songs written specially for him by some of the principal composers.

In compositions with an Irish sentiment he gained great praise for his tender interpretation of themes that were then novel to English audiences. In the large cities and in the provincial towns alike his career was continued with increasing favour.

LEADING TENOR

He became leading tenor of the Moody Manners Opera Company, with which he toured extensively in Ireland. His "firsts" included "Mike Murphy" in Stanford's "Seamus O'Brien"; he was the first Irish "Rudolph" in "La Boheme", and a few years later also the first in this country to fill the part of "Cavardossi" in "Tosca." He also appeared in the Irish premiere of "Samson and Delilah."

In 1912, he consolidated his fame by establishing the O'Mara Opera Company, in which he was leading tenor as well as managing director.

Gathering around him a fine selection of singers and musicians, he initiated a remarkable revival of interest in grand opera.

COMPANY

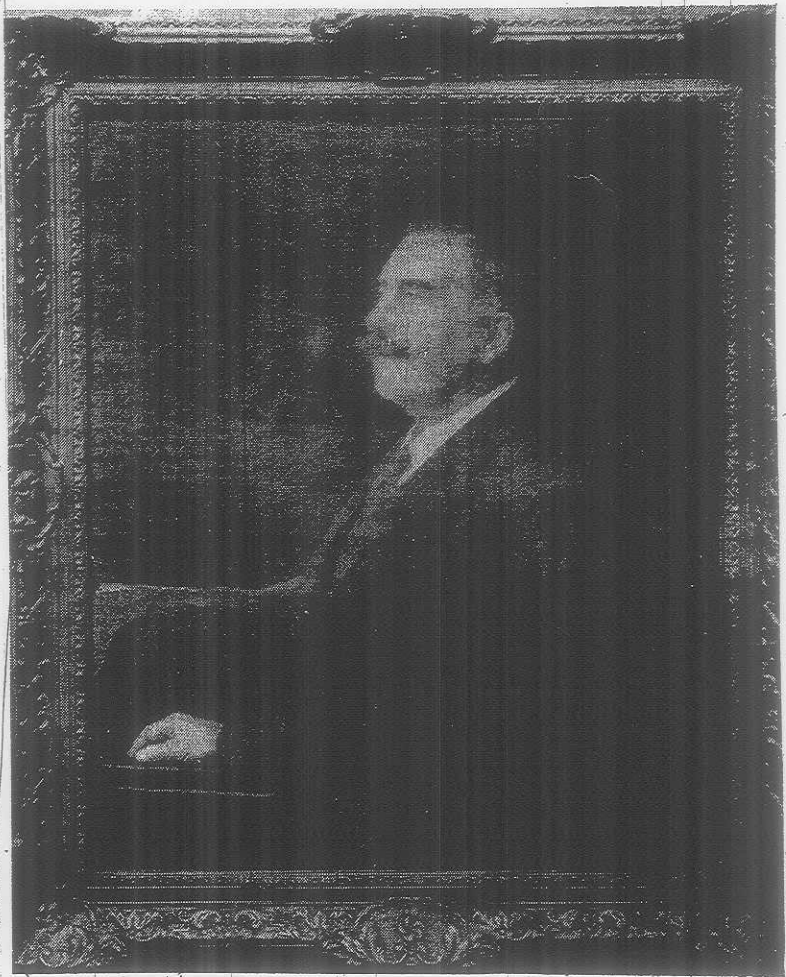
Since the first performance in Cork in 1913, the Company went from success to success. And many young singers who subsequently became famous served their apprenticeship under O'Mara's thorough management.

Despite frequent heavy losses he carried on his onerous responsibility with admirable pluck and ability, visiting England, Wales and Scotland regularly. He toured the United States for three years and was there given a tumultuous welcome.

In 1926 O'Mara retired from the operatic stage and transferred his Company to other hands. He settled down in Dublin, occasionally reappearing on the concert platform. It may be added that he took the keenest interest in the Fels Ceoil, where the Joseph O'Mara prizes were annually competed for.

LIBERAL

He was a liberal supporter of every good and charitable work both by voice and purse. His last public appearance on a



Portrait of Joseph O'Mara in the Limerick Art Gallery.

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SCHOOLBOYS' SOCCER

Inter-Firm soccer fixtures