There have been many singers in the history of opera who have chosen the concert platform in preference to the opera house. The reasons are many, the choice subjective. Perhaps an artist simply felt less than comfortable on the opera stage, or that he or she lacked histrionic ability. Others may have realised that the voice was of slender resources and may not have told in a large theatre. Some preferred a medium which, arguably, speaks directly to an audience, which touches the heart in a manner that grand opera may not. To choose that path in no way demeans. We think of an obvious example in John McCormack, who confessed that he was not comfortable in grand opera but became a household name and world-famous in the concert hall.

Lillian Blauvelt was one such. Although the soprano did appear in opera it was the concert platform that she preferred. Her career also touched musicals and musical comedy.

Our soprano was born on 16 March 1873 in Brooklyn, New York to Peter Isaac Blauvelt and Elizabeth Evans. Her father was of Dutch origin; her mother Welsh. She was the fortunate beneficiary of a loving and comfortable upbringing and she showed considerable aptitude for music at a very young age. She was sufficiently proficient on the violin by the age of 8 to appear before the public in local church concerts. She also sang and played the piano. By eleven she was already reaching the attention of the local paper. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* comments on a concert given at the home of a local benefactor on 7 December 1884:

> On the evening of December 3 The Beethoven [sic] gave its first musicale at the residence of Mr. H.A. Richard .... The pianists were Miss Blauvelt..... Miss Lillian Blauvelt performed several brilliant solos
on the violin. The singers were Miss Blauvelt.... Among the visitors were many distinguished ladies and gentlemen of this city and New York.

As she got older it was singing that most occupied her and she studied music and singing at the National Conservatory of Music of America. Its first director was the brilliant Belgian baritone Jacques Bouhy (1848-1929). By 1895 he had become a famous singing teacher and taught a number of illustrious pupils, among them Gervase Elwes, Clara Butt, Louise Kirkby Lunn, Suzanne Adams, Bessie Abott, Leon Rains, Eva Gauthier and Louise Homer.

Grounded with a sound technique Blauvelt emerged from the Conservatory and took the position of first soprano of the West Presbyterian Church in Manhattan while appearing in a wide variety of local concerts.

Blauvelt was married a number of times. In 1888 she married Royal S. Smith, a Brooklyn organist. By 1901 she was married to William F. Pendleton and around 1919/20 to the composer Alexander Savine.

It was almost certainly the influence of Bouhy that secured for her a possible début at La Monnaie in Brussels for the season 1891/92. A number of sources state that she sang there for several months. However, she does not appear in the online archives of that house.¹ The answer is to be found in the book Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie by Jules Salès, in which her name does appear in the roster for that season but is followed by the word ‘résilié’ (cancelled). Why this was the case is not known. However, as we shall see, she was to appear in another major house later in her career.

Over the next few years Blauvelt sang all over America, always garnering excellent reviews. In fact, during the course of the research for this article I did not find one adverse review. Obviously, the soprano chose her repertoire well and delighted audiences wherever she went. It would seem that she never appeared in an opera in the US, but did tread the boards of the Met. On 3 March 1895 she appeared in the Fifteenth Sunday Concert, during which she sang an unspecified aria from I Vespri Siciliani (probably ‘Mercè, dilette amiche’, which became something of a war horse for her and which she recorded in French both for Victor and Columbia), Bemberg’s ‘Nymphes et Sylvains’ and unstated German songs.

It was not long before she began to appear in the UK, where she, again, became popular with audiences country-wide. Her first appearance in the UK took place on 29 October 1898 at the Queen’s Hall in London, during a concert presided over by Henry Wood, in the first of a series of recently-inaugurated Saturday Symphony Concerts. The critic of the Manchester Guardian opined it was the first appearance in England of a well-known American soprano, Miss Lillian Blauvelt .... [she] carried her audience away by the grace and aplomb of her vocalisation. Her voice is a light high soprano of charming quality, and her style reflects the best training of the French school of today. Her rendering of the mad scene from Hamlet was distinguished alike by brilliancy and perfect absence of effort.

It appears that Blauvelt made quite an impression on Henry Wood for, years

¹ http://carmen.lamonnaie.be/
later, he recalled that among the finest artists that he had ever worked with were Busoni, Kreisler, Casals and Lillian Blauvelt.\footnote{Charles Reid, \textit{Thomas Beecham: An Independent Biography}, 1961, p.13}

Less than a month later she appeared in her first Hallé concert in Manchester, on 17 November, the \textit{Manchester Guardian} was effusive in its praise. It is worth quoting, as the unnamed critic describes her singing in great detail

It is not often that one has the opportunity of hearing on the same evening two such brilliant soloists as those of yesterday's concert. For if the pianist [Moszkowski] was masterly, the singer proved to be a star very nearly of the first magnitude. Miss Lillian Blauvelt, who appeared yesterday for the first time in Manchester, has an essentially first-rate kind of voice, and she sings in the “fearless old fashion” of those days when \textit{bel canto} was held to be the sole end and aim of the singer’s art. What has been said about instrumental technique of transcendent excellence is just as applicable to \textit{bel canto}. That too has a certain self-sufficient beauty, and there is very little danger of our hearing too much of it. Of Ophelia’s mad scene as set to music by Ambroise Thomas we have not a very high opinion; but, as it is quite beyond the powers of any but a very few singers, and as Miss Blauvelt is one of those few, the choice was perhaps justified. The trills, roulades, chromatic scales, and portamento passages were all admirably done. There was no fault to be found with anything, not even with the enunciation of the French text.

Following a five-month tour of the USA she rushed back to London for a recital at the Queen’s Hall on 5 July 1899. It was the first time that she had given a solo recital. \textit{The Times}'s critic was on hand to record the event

In spite of many attractions elsewhere, the vocal recital given yesterday afternoon by Miss Lillian Blauvelt drew a large audience to the Queen’s Hall. The singer was heard in a greater variety of songs than she had before attempted and her success was more decisive than on any former occasion. Beginning with “Tre giorni”, which, like most other singers, Miss Blauvelt prefers to regard as a serious and even melancholy song, and to ascribe to Pergolese [sic], she introduced, in French, a song from Handel’s \textit{Rodelinda}, and then passed to a group of German songs, singing Liszt’s melodious “O komm im Traum” with the great charm, although she is not as yet sufficiently accomplished interpreter of Brahms to do full justice to “O wüsst’ich doch” or “Meine Liebe ist grün”. A pretty and unpretentious little song in a popular style, Pirani’s “Come siete gentil”, was exquisitely sung, as was Delibes’s “Pourquoi”; the famous “Filles de Cadix” of the latter composer was given with much brilliance, which would have been at least as great if it had been taken at the usual pace instead of the excessively rapid tempo adopted. The same fault, of attempting to make showy songs more effective by hurrying them, was committed in Mlle. Chaminade’s “L’Été”, bracketed with Bouhy’s “Ave Printemps” and Saint-Säens’s “Pourquoi rester seulette”; both of these, as well as a couple by Rubinstein, were most artistically sung, and the recital was
brought to a splendid close with Mozart’s “Non temer amato bene”, the violin obbligato of which was played by Mr Ysaye.

Keeping track of her activities has been difficult as reference sources are not always reliable, but it would be incorrect to think that her career was confined to the US and UK. She certainly sang with success in Europe. For example, on 4 April 1901 she is found in a performance of the Verdi Requiem at Rome’s Teatro Costanzi, with Bonci, Elvira Ceresoli and Romano Nannetti, though she did not sing in opera at that house.

A significant milestone in her career was her début at Covent Garden, which took place on 2 June 1903, as Marguerite in Faust. Sharing the role with luminaries such as Nellie Melba, Emma Calvé, Suzanne Adams and Mary Garden and with colleagues such as Pol Plançon (Méphistofélès) and Thomas Salignac (Faust) she was in exalted company indeed. And it appears that she held her own, according to the unnamed critic of The Times.

The reputation enjoyed in the concert room by Mme. Lillian Blauvelt naturally made one look with keen interest upon her first appearance here in opera, which appearance she made as Marguerite in Faust last night. For some reasons one would naturally have preferred to hear her for the first time in Gounod’s other popular opera; for the part of Juliette, it seems to us, would “lie” more tellingly for her beautiful voice, and more particularly for the higher notes of it. But, taking things as they were, there is nothing to be said that is not in praise of her performance. Mme. Blauvelt takes the conventional weakly woman view of the part of Marguerite, that to which one is most accustomed; but the very freshness of her voice adds a new charm; and when her experience of Covent Garden is greater, and she can give full vent to her powers, there is no doubt but that she will be a very valuable acquisition to the opera, for she has grace and charm to add to the voice we all know.
This was closely followed by a performance of Carmen beginning 25 June, in which she shared the role of Micaëla with Suzanne Adams, with Calvé (Carmen), Salignac (Don José) and Antonio Scotti (Escamillo). Again, the critic of The Times was enthusiastic.

A special feature of the performance was the appearance of Mme. Lillian Blauvelt as Micaëla. The part is one that suits her quite admirably, and she may be said to be as much the ideal Micaëla as Mme. Calvé is the ideal Carmen .... The singer's lovely voice now tells excellently in the theatre, for, like many débutants at Covent Garden, she was evidently not quite certain at what part of the auditorium to direct her voice; she has now found the right place, and her notes were deliciously clear and exquisite in quality.

Despite her success in these roles, she never appeared at Covent Garden again. The soprano’s next major move was into musical comedy. It was the impresario Fred Whitney who persuaded her to leave opera for a lucrative contract, reportedly for over $500,000, to appear in The Rose of Alhambra at the Lyceum Theatre. Beginning on 15 November 1905, it would play for many months and toured extensively. The comedy, by C.E. Cook and Lucius Hosmer, centred on the Alhambra, in Granada, Spain, and the eccentric King Philip V, was a great success and Blauvelt shared the vocal component with the bass Eugene Cowles. According to The New York Times the next day, she was encored until compelled to refuse further acknowledgments.

Obviously the genre of musical comedy proved congenial, for by the end of 1905 she began appearing in The Magic Knight. Described as a one-act burlesque, by Victor Herbert, it ran from 25 December 1906 until 23 March 1907 at one of Broadway’s most popular theatres, Weber’s Music Hall. Intended as a parody of Lohengrin, the story is that Elsa (Blauvelt) is accused of murdering her brother, Godfrey (Maurice Farkoa), who has mysteriously disappeared, but Elsa is guilty of nothing more than an excessive fondness for singing cadenzas. Frederick (Frank Belcher), who was to have married Elsa, marries the enchantress Ortrud (Cora Tracey) instead. Ortrud has turned Godfrey into a swan. Elsa calls upon a magic knight to save her by engaging in combat with Frederick. A first call to fairyland to summon the knight is unsuccessful but, after a second, the knight arrives on the back of the enchanted swan. The knight soon defeats the cowardly Frederick and turns the swan back into Godfrey. He asks Elsa to marry him, but when she asks his name, the enchantment is broken. He must return to fairyland, leaving Elsa alone and grief-stricken, but still singing cadenzas.

Blauvelt continued to sing in concerts both in the US and the UK but slowly disappears from view. According to Kutsch and Riemens she created the title role of Xenia in Alexander Savine’s opera in Zurich in 1914. Other sources including the online ‘Italian Opera: la ricerca musicale in Italia’ give the date as 1919.

She continued to appear in the UK at the Queen’s Hall until 1919 and in the US until the early 20s. Kutsch and Riemens also lists tours in 1920 of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.

She later settled in Chicago, where, according to Kutsch and Riemens, she taught, though this has not been confirmed. Lillian Blauvelt died on 29 August 1947 in Cook County, Illinois. She is buried in Libertyville, Illinois.
LILLIAN BLAUVELT DISCOGRAPHY

by Larry Lustig

Victor, with piano, unless stated otherwise

B- = 10-in. (25 cm.); C- = 12-in. (30 cm.)

17 September 1903, Camden?
1) Les Vêpres Siciliennes: Merci jeunes amies (Bolero) (Verdi)
   B-424-1 unpublished

2) Ecstasy (Arditi)
   B-425-1 unpublished

3) Faust: Ah! Je ris de me voir si belle (Gounod) w. orchestra
   C-426-1 unpublished

4) Carmen: Je dis que rien ne m’épouvante (Bizet) w. orchestra
   B-427-1,-2 unpublished

5) Les filles de Cadiz (de Musset/Delibes)
   B-428-1 unpublished

6) Comin’ thro’ the Rye (Burns/trad.)
   B-429-1 unpublished

13 April 1905, Camden

7) Les Vêpres Siciliennes: Merci jeunes amies (Bolero) (Verdi)
   B-424-2 81067 64029 IRCC 8 AGSA 4

8) a) My Bairnie (Parker/Vannah); b) Comin’ thro’ the Rye (Burns/trad.)
   B-429-2 81068 64031

9) Roméo et Juliette: Je veux vivre (Gounod)
   C-2471-1 85070 74027

10) Clari: Home, sweet home (Payne/Bishop)
    B-2472-1,-2 64030 81069

15 February 1906, Camden?

11) The last rose of summer (Moore/Irish folk)
   C-3112-1,-2,-3 unpublished

12) Faust: Ah! Je ris de me voir si belle (Gounod)
    C-3113-1 unpublished

Columbia Graphophone Co., New York, all 12-in. (30 cm.)
with orchestra, unless otherwise stated

13) Les Vêpres Siciliennes: Merci jeunes amies (Bolero) (Verdi)
    30091-1 Mar? 1907 30069 Manhattan 30069
        Star 30069
    30091-2 Mar? 1907 C1045 (Spain)
    30091-3 Mar? 1907 C1045 (Spain)
    30091-? Mar? 1907 30091 (UK) E5016 D16957 (UK)
    (reverse of C1045 is Ruth Vincent: Villanelle (Dell’Acqua)
14) Cherry ripe (Herrick/Horn)
   30112-1 c. 7 Feb 08 30112 A5017
   (reverse of A5017 Anton van Rooy: Das Mühlrad (folk song))
15) Les filles de Cadix (de Musset/Delibes)
   30113-1 c. 7 Feb 08 30013 A5003 E5016
   (reverse of A5003 Charles Gilibert: Don Giovanni: Deh vieni alla finestra)
16) Roméo et Juliette: Je veux vivre (Gounod)
   30124-1,-2 c. 7 May 08 30124
17) Clari: Home, sweet home (Payne/Bishop) w. piano
   30125-1 c. 7 May 08 30125 A5008
   Man. 30125
   (reverse of A5008 Charles Gilibert: Serenade (Margoton) (Mozart))
18) The last rose of summer (Moore/Irish folk) w. piano
   30126-1,-2 c. 7 May 08 30126 A5019
   Man. 30126
   (reverse of A5019 is David Bispham: The pirate song (Gilbert))
19) Il Barbiere di Siviglia: Una voce poco fa (Rossini)
   30150 c. Jan-Oct 08 A5078
   (reverse of A5078 is Charles Gilibert: Madrigal (Lemaire))
20) Songs, op. 19: Ecstasy (words & music Beach) w. piano
   30240-1 c. 1909 Man. 30240
21) Rodelinda: Le printemps (Mio caro bene) (Handel) w. piano
   30252-1 c. Aug. 1909 A5120
22) Ouvrez (Dessauer) (Le retour des promis) w. piano
   30253-1 c. Aug. 1909 A5119
23) When Celia sings (Bingham/Moir)
   30254-1 c. Aug. 1909 A5119
24) Messiah: Rejoice greatly (Handel) accompaniment unknown
   30255-1 c. Aug. 1909? Man. 30255
25) Messiah: Unknown title
   30256 unpublished
26) A Norwegian song (Play on, play on) (Logé) w. piano
   30262-1 c. Jan-Aug. 1909 A5120
27) Die Schöpfung: With verdure clad (Nun beut die Flur) (Haydn)
   30267-? 1909/1910 Man. 30267
28) Mignon: Connais-tu le pays? (Thomas)
   30268-1 1909 Man. 30268

Lillian Blauvelt reissues
(these lists are not intended to be comprehensive)

LP reissues
Cantilena 6228: de Lussan, Emma Juch and Lillian Blauvelt: 7 or 3, 14, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 26
EMI RLS 724: The Record of Singing, Vol. I: 22
EMI RLS 7705: A Record Of Singers - Part 1: 22

CD reissues
Symposium 1361: America’s Singers Recorded: 7
Sony MH2K 62334: The 1903 Grand Opera Series: 15
EMI RLS 7705: A Record Of Singers - Part 1: 22