

KLAFSKY Katharina

1855 - 1896

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(felje Otto Lohse)

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Klafsky (kläf'-shki), Katharina. 1855-1896.

German operatic artist of international reputation, said to have been the finest Brünnhilde ever heard on the stage. She was born at St. Johann, in Hungary, where her father was a poor shoemaker. Both her father and mother were musical, however, and she showed signs of talent at an early age, singing in a church at eight. In 1870 her mother died and she left home and went to Odenburg, where she begged in the streets for her living. Later she became a nursery maid, and the people for whom she worked, noticing her voice, had her taught singing by Neuwirth. She then went into the chorus of the Komische Opera. There the younger Hellmesberger became interested in her and persuaded Mme. Marchesi to give her some lessons. In 1875 she went into the chorus at Salzburg, and a year later married a merchant, Herr Liebermann, and temporarily retired from the stage. She became tired of domestic life after six years, however, got a divorce from Liebermann, went on the stage again, and played small parts in Angelo Neumann's Company at the Leipsic Theatre. Her popularity increased and she was applauded as Venus in Tannhäuser, Alice, Bertha, and especially as Brangäne in Tristan, given at Leipsic in 1882. The same year she accompanied Neumann on a Wagner tour, playing minor parts most of the time, but giving Sieglinde and Brünnhilde successfully at Danzig and Berlin, during the absence of the regular star. She was finally hired at Bremen to take Reichter-Kindermann's place as leading lady and made her debut as

Fidelio in 1883. From that time she continued in leading roles and by 1895 was everywhere recognized as one of the greatest of German singers. In 1892 her second husband, Franz Greve, a barytone, died, and she went to England, where she appeared at Drury Lane and Covent Garden as Fidelio, Leonora, Brünnhilde and other Wagnerian characters. In 1894 she again sang at Drury Lane, giving Elsa and Agatha in Der Freischütz. Later the same year, she appeared at the Lamoureux concerts at Paris. In 1895 she created the character of La Navarraise of Massenet, in German at Hamburg, married Otto Lohse, and went with him to America, where she became the star and he the conductor of the Damrosch German Opera Company, appearing in New York, Boston, Cincinnati, St. Louis and New Orleans. The next year she returned to Hamburg. Her last appearance was as Fidelio, September 11, 1896. She died about ten days later from an unsuccessful operation for brain tumor.