



1950 Photo of Leanord Warren

Written by K. Gullage

It was a crisp March night at the Metropolitan Opera it was the closing second act of *La Forza del Destino*. Leonard Warren was singing giving one of the best performances of his life.

“El Salvo El Salvo” -- he is saved! The famous baritone Leanord Warren sang as he turned left to exit and collapsed on the stage in the Metropolitan Opera. After singing his closing lines to the aria “O fatal pages of my destiny” he does not move.

Stunned silence followed a gasp by Mr. Leanord’s wife, Agatha Leiffen Warren, watching from her parterre box. Everyone thought Warren simply tripped but he did not move. Even the conductor Thomas Shipper stood in disbelief.

The baritone Roald Reitan, playing Don Alvaro, was the first at Warren’s side. “Lenny what is it?” He asks Mr. Warren and receives no reply as he turned Mr. Warren over.

Finally, someone in the crowd yelled “drop the curtain” as the house physician, Dr. Adrain William Zornig, hurried backstage. The audience moved to the lobby with murmurs of concern in the air. Everyone is wondering the same thing, what happened?

When the lights in the lobby dimmed, signaling the audience to take their seats once more, there was a heavy feeling in the atmosphere, a great oppressive weight hanging over everyone.

Rudolph Bing the General Manager walked on stage with his hands clasped. “It’s one of the saddest days” he began before being interrupted with a wail of “Oh no! Oh no!”

Moans and whispers of “he’s gone” could be heard all around as Bing continued, asking the audience to stand in tribute to one of the greatest performers to have ever lived. “He died as if he wanted to die, he died in the middle of performance,” Bing said.

Leanord Warren was declared dead from a massive cerebral hemorrhage at 10:15 just ten minutes after he collapsed.

The performance did not continue after the tribute. The police blocked the backstage preventing the audience from going there. Outside three ambulances waited. His body was moved to the dressing room and then to the Abby Funeral Home at 66th and Lexington.

Mr. Warren was widely regarded as the best baritone in the world, appearing in more than 600 performances in more than 22 roles. He was set to perform more next week in *Simon Boccanegra*. Nevertheless, Mr. Bing says this performance was his greatest performance.

Born in the Bronx, he attended Public School 11 and graduated from Evander Childs High School before attending Columbia University for business. He wanted to work in his father's business as a fur broker before starting his music career in 1935.

He started his career with the Radio City Music Hall and sang with their chorus for three years but never solo. In 1938, he heard the Met had a radio show called "Auditions of the Air," his audition was so good Wilfrid Canature thought he was a ringer.

From there, Leonard started to appear all around singing a variety of music. Most notably the Sans Francisco Opera, Chicago Opera, and Summer Cincinnati Opera, he did recordings for RCA Victor and more.