



AMICA International

Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association

Honor Roll

In the 1930s and '40s, the late **Mana-Zucca**, a famous composer and singer, reigned as Miami's grand dame of music. She and husband **Irwin Cassel**, co-owner of Cromer-Cassel department store, hosted the world's concert greats in Mazica Hall, their stately stucco home on 17th Street near Biscayne Bay (long gone to the wrecking ball).

Mana-Zucca, a child prodigy who played with the New York Philharmonic at age 8, died March 8, 1981. She was in her late 80s or mid 90s, depending on who's counting.

Her only child, prominent Miami lawyer **Marwin Cassel**, hoped to find a permanent home for his mother's vast collection of memorabilia. It didn't happen. He died from lung cancer in 1999 at age 74.

But now? Mission accomplished. Marwin's widow, **Leslie Cassel**, 52, donated the Mana-Zucca collection to Florida International University -- handwritten and published scores, journals, manuscripts, recordings, and photos autographed by such legends as **George Gershwin, Arthur Fiedler, Jan Peerce, Jascha Heifetz** and **Robert Merrill**. In all, 76 cartons, 38,000 items. Eight decades of Mana and her music. Appraised value: \$47,927.



At 8 p.m. Thursday, FIU's School of Music hosts a Mana-Zucca concert in Marwin Cassel's memory. The symphony orchestra, wind ensemble and concert choir will perform the works of the lady born **Gussy Zucherman**.

Her most popular tune, *I Love Life*, with lyrics by her husband (recorded in '62 by **Paul Anka**), is on the program, to be sung by students from Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary.

**DR. MANA-ZUCCA - AMICA HONORARY MEMBER
BY ALF E, WEROLIN**

AMICA's recently elected honorary member, Dr. Mana Zucca, was a child prodigy, has composed over 1100 published musical pieces, and from her early youth has been a world renowned concert pianist and recording artist. She holds an honorary doctor's degree in music from the University of Miami, and has been awarded a scroll marking her 50th year of membership in ASCAP. Her professional career is by no means ended, for she continues active and dynamic in the Miami area, but she is regarded as a legend in her own time covering a span of years that stretches from Victor Herbert to Elton John.

This gifted lady was born Christmas day in new York City and was one of six children. Her maiden name was Gizella Zucca-Mana, but she never used it and later, while attending music school in Berlin, she turned her surname around and legalized "Mana-Zucca." She was married in the early twenties to Irwin M. Cassel, who wrote the lyrics for many of her songs. He died in 1971, ending their marriage of 49 years. Their only child, Marwin Shepard Cassel, is a Miami attorney. Mana-Zucca has three grandchildren and regards her son as her best composition.

(Much of what follows has been extracted from an interview article which appeared in the Miami Herald, by Eleanor Hart.)

Her first musical notes were struck on a toy piano, at age three. "I happened to hit on a tune in G major and I couldn't find F sharp. The black keys (sharps and flats) were just painted on. I was looking under the piano for that note and crying, 'This piano's no good.' One of our guests, Jacques Danielson, husband of the novelist Fannie Hurst, said, 'Lord, that child has absolute pitch. She's unhappy because she can't find that sharp!'"

Lessons on a "real" piano followed and at age four Mana played in her first recital. By the time she was eight, she was ready for her first large concert in Carnegie Hall with the New York Philharmonic. "I was like Shirley Temple. Everyone knew me as a child prodigy."

Composing music came naturally. "I always have but I didn't know it was composing at first. I write quickly," and~songs always to fit the lyrics, "the right way to do it."

Her hallmark, of course, is "I Love Life," published in the early '30s and most famous of her 1100 published works. She considered it "a cheap little song" at the time but has since changed her mind because of its success. John Charles Thomas made it a hit and Nelson Eddy, Laurence Tibbett and Rosa Ponselle all made it part of their repertoires.

Her husband, Irwin Cassel, wrote the lyrics. She had stopped writing for a period after their only child was born in 1925. "He (Irwin) suggested that I start writing again.



I wrote several pieces, 'Prelude' and 'Poem' but he said 'No, that's not what I mean.' I said, 'You write the lyrics and I'll write the music.'" She did - in 30 minutes. "I Love Life" was ironically the only one of her songs to be turned down by her publisher.



"I have others just a famous," she insists. "Composers don't like it when the public only associates them with one number. Rachmaninoff used to hate his 'Prelude' because that's all people remembered. But I've been lucky. I've had four big hits - 'Big Brown Bear,' 'Nichevo,' (Nothing Matters) and 'Valse Brillante,' a piano number.

She recalls with zest one of the many "I Love Life" anecdotes. A plane approaching Denver developed engine trouble and when the pilot announced the fact, a terrified passenger started singing "Nearer My God to Thee." He was drowned out by another who sang "I Love Life." The plane landed safely and a friend who was aboard called Mana to report the incident.

People rather than things or events inspire her, she says. For example, Artur Rubinstein inspired her "Bolero de Concert."

Most recent publications from her reservoir of 1000 unpublished works which include an American-Chinese grand opera - "I'm holding back. I don't want to crowd myself" - are "Love's Dart" and "It Was No Dream," and a piano number, Sonata No. 3. "My best work, but it will probably take 20 years before it gets known. So much will be produced after I'm gone," she says.

Musical comedy days included playing in Rudolf Frimil's "High Jinks" operetta, dancing with Clifton Webb, playing daughter to Will Rogers in "Town Topics" on Broadway, and touring with the comedy team of Gallagher and Sheen.

"People," Mana reflects, "always think I'm older than I am." She recalls meeting a woman who was amazed "that I was alive. 'You were a friend of my grandmother,' she exclaimed. Well, I was, when I was five and the grandmother was 70! Older people were all I knew. I never played with children."

Life is quieter now in the Miami Beach home moved into shortly before her husband died. Gone are the days of Mazica Hall, her former showplace home, that could accommodate an audience of 300 and where more than 500 concerts were given. The house was sold and razed to make room for Jordan Marsh.

Many of Mana-Zucca's compositions were recorded by her for various roll manufacturers. Her Ampico recordings are perhaps the best known and many of these are accompaniments which several well-known artists used instead of live accompanists. Some of the titles are:

The Big Brown Bear 63071F Composed and recorded by Mana-Zucca.

The Cry of the Woman

I Love Life

In addition, Valse Brillante. OP. 20 (#52764F) was recorded by Mana-Zucca for the Ampico.

A warm musical atmosphere still prevails in ManaZucca's home. There is a pair of concert grand pianos - a Steinway and a Baldwin (what, no reproducing piano?). But in addition, there are over 200 other pianos! These are prize miniatures which the pianist-composer has collected from all over the world. They range from a

reproduction of Mozart's harpsichord and beautifully detailed Dresden, Meissen, silver and ivory pieces, to a model carved out of an old cigar box by a war veteran. Archaic reproductions from 18th century drawing rooms find themselves in company with the first piano brought to this country by John Jacob Astor, a miniature scribbled on by composer Oscar Strauss, and even a copy of Helen Morgan's piano, with the figure of the torch singer perched on top. Along with all these gems is the piano which started the whole thing - a plywood model carved by her small son years ago.



Mana-Zucca is a young American musician and was born in New York City, where she (note!) studied with Alexander Lambert. When only seven years old she appeared with the New York Symphony Orchestra, Walter Damrosch, conductor, playing the Beethoven Concerto (A.P. note: Duo-Art didn't say which one); and also with the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia Orchestras. At eleven she toured the United States as a musical prodigy, playing compositions by Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Anton Rubinstein and Saint-Saens.

Thereafter she went abroad and studied the pianoforte with Busoni and Godowsky in Berlin, and composition with Max Vogrich in London. After concertizing in Germany, Russia, France, England and Holland, Miss Zucca returned home and studied with Herman Spieler in New York. She has composed more than one hundred pieces ... and her compositions have been sung and played by several of the

leading artists of today." (Born Gisella Zucca-Mana, the artist is said to have legalized her name as "Mana-Zucca", but Aeolian lists the name without the hyphen).

On the other hand, Nicholas Slonimsky, in "Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Music and Musicians", states that: "... (real name Augusta Zuckerman.) American pianist and composer, born New York, Dec. 25, 1887; d. Miami Beach, March 8, 1981. She studied piano with Alexander Lambert in N.Y.; then went to Europe, where she took some lessons with Leopold Godowsky and Busoni in Berlin. Upon her return to the U.S., she was exhibited as a piano prodigy. In 1916 she changed her name by juggling around the syllables of her real last name and dropping her first name altogether. She was soloist in her own Piano Concerto in New York on Aug. 20, 1919; her Violin Concerto, Op. 224, was performed in N.Y. on Dec. 9, 1955.

She published under the title My Musical Calendar, a collection of 366 piano pieces, one to be played every day, with the supernumerary opus to account for leap years. Among her many songs, which brought her real success was I Love Life (A.P. note: John Charles Thomas often sang it). In 1940 she settled in Florida.

I'd give more credence to Slonimsky, the demon lexicographer who went to extraordinary lengths to certify his information, than to the anonymous Aeolian scribe. Everything you ever wanted to know about Mana-Zucca ... and more!

- Albert M. Petrak

Mana-Zucca Passes

In January, 1980, I received a charming letter from Honorary Member Mana-Zucca in reply to the invitation to attend the Convention in Pasadena. She could not come, but wished all of us a fine Convention. What follows is a portion of the brochure she sent to me at that time. On March 8, 1981, Mana-Zucca passed away in Florida. Several AMICAns sent newspaper clippings to me. The one below relates the interesting life led by Mana-Zucca, whom we are sorry to lose.

D.B.

The Miami Herald, Tuesday, March 10, 1981 - DR. MANA-ZUCCA, A LIVING LEGEND

Mana-Zucca is the winner of many categories. She is an ageless beauty, world composer, famed pianist, sparkling raconteur, master teacher - and pioneer in Miami's cultural life.

Undoubtedly, Mana-Zucca had the exquisite complexion and charisma at birth, but her remarkable talent was not discovered until she was three while improvising on her toy piano. The result was a scholarship at New York's National Conservator of Music, followed by study in Europe with piano immortals, Leo pold Godowsky and Ferruccio Busoni.

After a recital at three, she gave her first major concert at age eight with the New York Philharmonic Society at Carnegie Hall. Walter Damrosch conducted her in the Beethoven C Major Piano Concerto. She toured the United States until thirteen, then Europe, both as a pianist and in musical comedy.

Mana's first published work at ten has been followed by more than 1100 vocal and instrumental compositions. "I Love Life" with lyrics by her late husband, Irwin Cassel, a favorite of singers, John Charles Thomas, Nelson Eddy and Paul Anka, is Mana's best known; however, she considers her Sonata for cello and piano the most difficult and endearing of all her creations.

Mana's marriage to Miamian Cassel contributed to this City's rich cultural heritage. She helped organize the University of Miami Orchestra, the Community Concert Series, and, in the middle 30's, she inaugurated the Mana-Zucca Music Club at her bayfront home with weekly concerts by stellar artists(Jan Peerce, Jose Iturbi, William Kappel, Mischa Elman) and the "soon-to-be-famous". Her home became the Carnegie Hall of the South.

She says, "I've always had luck", but anyone has to have more than luck to cause international critics to say: "sensation" (Washington Post), "triumph" (Los Angeles Examiner),"touch of poetry" (London Daily Telegraph) and "genius", (N. Y. Evening Mail).

Helga H. Eason, Book Review Editor, "The Pen Woman"

Mana-Zucca: Legend And

Lively Charmer

From *The Miami Herald*, January 28, 1979. Contributed by Bill Eicher.

By JAMES ROOS

Herald Music Editor

If Mana-Zucca really is the relic of a vanished age, she may be the liveliest relic this writer ever encountered. Call her Miami's musical matriarch, the composer not only of *I Love Life*, the song that helped make her famous, but also of more than 1,000 works, from concertos and sonatas to the piano trio and songs you can hear Tuesday afternoon in the Lunchtime Lively Arts Series' "Tribute to a Musical Legend."

The legend is a charmer. In the living room of her big Miami Beach home - a happy holdover from a more spacious era - she looks you squarely in the eye and insists, with a slight twinkle, that she really isn't as old as all that. "No, I'm not 90," she says, chuckling. "People always think I am older than I really am because I started so young as a prodigy."

Suffice it to say Mana-Zucca is over 21. She has to be to have had nodding acquaintance with Joseph Joachim, friend and confidant of Brahms; to have charmed Victor Herbert into that loving inscription on his photograph so prominently displayed on her table; to have beguiled even Franz Lehar himself into suggesting that she star in an operetta. Even now, her pretty face radiates the enchanting smile that made Adolf Zukor want to turn her into a second Mary Pickford.

THE TROPHIES of a fabulous lifetime surround her. The Meissen bric-a-brac; the 200-plus miniature pianos - some porcelain, some wood - that comprise her cherished collection; the two grand pianos - a Steinway and Baldwin; the elegant tapestries and rugs and tiffany lamp that once graced her Miami showplace called Mazica Hall on what today is the Jordan Marsh complex.

From the 1920s through the mid-1950s that fabled place was the watering spot for more stellar artists than you can shake a stick at. Misha Elman, Josef Hoffmann, Jose Iturbi, Fritz Kreisler, Alma Gluck and Efrem Zimbalist - the cream of the musical crop - came to play at her concerts each Tuesday, when audiences of 300 filled her 80-foot living room, and where over the seasons more than 500 concerts, for and by young people, were held.

So, in a way, meeting Mana-Zucca is practically like meeting Miami music in person.

She doesn't discourage the notion either. "You know many of today's greats gave their first concerts in my home," among them cellist Leonard Rose. "You see this?" she asks, pointing to a glass figurine. "That was a gift from the actor Tony Randall, and for years I didn't even know it. I met him at a party one night when he was already a famous actor and he asked me if I remembered that glass piece.

"I ASKED HOW he knew about it, and he told me his parents gave it to me because I was so kind to his sister who played the piano at one of my concerts when she was a little girl." Apparently, anybody who was anybody passed through Mana-Zucca's portals.

And to her it might all have happened yesterday, because her career has been so long. Born on Christmas Day in New York into a family of six children, Mana, as she is affectionately known by friends, gave her first public "concert," unbeknownst to her parents, at 2¹/₈ while singing on the stoop of her house. People threw pennies at her, and from that moment on she never missed a performing trick.

She played her first notes on a toy piano at three. "I struck on a tune in G major and and couldn't find F-sharp," she recalls. "The black keys (the 4harps and flats) were just painted on, so I looked under the piano for that note and cried 'This piano's no good.'"

JACQUES DANIELSON, the husband of novelist Fanny Hurst, who happened to be a guest of her parents, said "Lord, that child has absolute pitch. She's unhappy because she can't find that sharp!" Music lessons followed, and by the time Mans, was eight she was playing Beethoven's First Piano Concerto with Walter Damrosch and the New York Philharmonic.

"I was like Shirley Temple. Everyone knew me as a child prodigy. And I only knew older people. In fact, I never looked for a chair," she says, her eyes still glinting. "I always looked for a lap and I sat on so many famous laps," Somehow, it seems, she was consistently extraordinary, even to the point of entering the annals of dentistry.

"I had no teeth until I was 2 so they used to feed me sponge cake and port wine. Once my parents put out 12 glasses for guests and I drank them all before dinner. When they found me flat on the floor they thought at first I was dead" - only to have the doctor arrive to proclaim her drunk.

No matter. By the age of 13, she was studying piano and playing In Berlin under the alias Augusta Zukerman, a name she still despises as much as her real one, Gizella Zucca-Mana. "I hated to see those on programs, but when I reversed Zucca-Mana to Mana-Zucca I thought it was fine." And so she kept at that way.

IT WAS DURING her teenage years in Berlin that the aspiring pianist-composer studied - however briefly - with Leopold Godowsky and Ferruccio Busoni, the famed Italian pianist. "All Busoni really did was listen to you. The first time I played for him I was sitting wit. group of other pianists waiting for him to enter," she says. Michael Zadora, an older colleague, asked her what she was going to play.

"`Raff's Gigue und Variationen,' I said, which was my piece, and all I knew. 'Oh, you can't play that trash for Busoni,' Zadora said, 'he won't listen to it. You have to play something meaty by Beethoven or somebody great.' When Busoni walked In he looked straight at me and said 'Au spielst! (You play!~ and I showed him the music. He was immediately interested," upon which Mana did an about-face and stuck out her tongue at Zadora.



MANA ZUCCA
Melodee Catalog, 1923

After she played for Busoni, the master said "bravo." "But I told him I hadn't heard what he said. He got angry at having to repeat 'bravo', but asked if he could take the music home to study it."

WELL, YOU can't say Mana-Zucca lacked spunk. To lure Joachim into attending her Berlin debut at Bechstein Hall she went alone to his house - a "no-no" - where she caught him off-guard and, with all her little-girl charm, offered him two free passes to her recital. Totally disarmed, she insists, the great man actually showed up at the concert, causing quite a stir in the audience.

Later, while living with South African millionaires in London, who were entertaining Lehar, among others, she sang one of his songs impromptu when no one else could be found to do it, impressing not only the composer but an English manager who signed her the very next day to sing in a musical at the Davis Theater. That launched Mana-Zucca's musical comedy career, during which she appeared in Rudolf Friml's operetta *High Jinks* and on Broadway in *Town Topica*, dancing with Clifton Webb and playing daughter to Will Rodgers.

After marrying Irwin Cassel, founder of what today are Miami's Richards stores, she divided her year between Europe, New York and Miami. Composing always came naturally, she insists - in fact, she wrote her Concerto for Piano and Orchestra at the age of 17. But it wasn't until her marriage and collaboration with Cassel, who often wrote her lyrics, that she began composing popular songs.

NATURALLY, HER best composition, she insists, Is her only son, Miami attorney Marwin Cassel, who gave her three grandchildren to boot. But the public has proclaimed *I Love Life*, paradoxically her only song to be rejected by a publisher, its favorite, along with *The Big Brown Bear* and *The Cry of the Woman*.

Generally speaking, Mana-Zucca's music is marked by superior craftsmanship, melodic lines, sometimes flecked with tart harmonies, and the brilliance of instrumental writing has appealed to a good many virtuosos. Jascha Heifetz, Misha Elman, and more recently Aaron Rosand, have played her violin pieces. And at his last Miami recital, Shura Cherkassy programmed two of her works.

So It ought to be interesting to hear a wider range of Mana-Zucca's music at Tuesday's concert, when at least three of the performers - pianists Ruth Greenfield and Jose Mariscal and soprano Betty Whales - will be former students. The free 1 p.m. concert, at Miami-Dade Community College's Downtown Campus Auditorium, features a videotape and slide documentary on Mana-Zucca, and the composer herself will be on hand to talk about the music on the program, which goes this way:

Two songs, *Im Lenz* and *Love's Dart*, sung by Marie Louise Leeds; the last movement of the First Piano Sonata, plus the *Rency Etude*, *Burlesque* and *Valse Brillante*, played by Jose Mariscal: the second the third movements of the Piano Trio, with Ruth Greenfield, pianist, Roslind Lang, violinist, and Burton Dines, cellist; Don Bennett singing *Nichevo*, Car`or Jacob Bornstein singing *Rachem*, Betty Whales singing three songs including *Big Brown Bear*, Rosalina Sackstein playing the *Cuban Dance* and *Badinage* for piano, and Michael Irwin playing the *Serenade* for cello.