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The Operatic Careers of Polish Transmigrants Marcella Sembrich and Lola Beeth on World Stages

Abstract

This article is devoted to the figures of Marcella Sembrich and Lola Beeth, Polish opera singers who, having received education in Lviv, developed their artistic careers outside their homeland as transmigrants. They both integrated into the societies and cultures of their destination countries, contributing to their development while maintaining ties with Poland through interpersonal contacts as well as artistic and political activity. The author traces the consecutive stages of her protagonists' lives: educational migration, the course of their artistic careers, their links with Poland, as well as their legacy and

the memory of them. She points out that their world careers were influenced by diverse factors; alongside talent, motivation, and hard work, there was also their ability to create a public image, as well as the involvement of other people: family members, teachers, benefactors, managers, opera impresarios and managing directors.

Keywords

Marcella Sembrich, Lola Beeth, opera singers, transmigration

Abstrakt

Kariery polskich transmigrantek Marcelli Sembrich i Loli Beeth na światowych scenach operowych

Artykuł poświęcony jest polskim śpiewaczkom operowym Marcelli Sembrich i Loli Beeth wykształconym we Lwowie, transmigrantkom rozwijającym kariery artystyczne poza ojczyzną. Obie zintegrowały się ze społecznościami i kulturami krajów osiedlenia, przyczyniły się do ich rozwoju, jednocześnie podtrzymując więź z Polską przez kontakty interpersonalne, działania artystyczne i polityczne. Autorka omawia kolejne etapy życia bohaterek: migracja edukacyjna, przebieg kariery artystycznej, związki z Polską, dziedzictwo i pamięć o śpiewaczkach. Zwraca uwagę, że na ich światowe kariery wpłynęły tak różne czynniki jak: talent, motywacja i intensywna praca, autokreacja publicznego wizerunku, a także współdziałanie innych osób: członków rodziny, pedagogów, mecenasów, menedżerów, impresariów oraz dyrektorów oper.

Słowa kluczowe

Marcella Sembrich, Lola Beeth, śpiewacy operowi, transmigracje

At the turn of the 20th century, migration was a common phenomenon in world theatre, especially musical theatre. Music was closely associated with universal values, which meant that it always found a wider audience. Many rulers and financial magnates of the time, recognizing music as the noblest of the arts, built representative opera houses and spared no expense in hiring the most talented artists. Encouraged by the prospect of an international career and financial success that opened up when they were hired by one of the prestigious opera theatres, they left their homeland and embraced a migrant life. This was also the case for many singers from Poland.

I will present the lives and careers of two of them, Marcella Sembrich and Lola Beeth, born in Galicia (Sembrich in Wiśniowczyk near Tarnopol, Beeth in Kraków), associated with Lviv, the city of their early youth and first stage successes. A comparison of their lives and professional paths reveals both parallels and divergences, situating their biographies within the transmigration processes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Transmigration refers to the mobility of people within a geopolitical and cultural space, repeatedly crossing national and cultural borders. An important component of this is the identification of individuals with the heritage and current situation of the ethnic community of their country of origin, while at the same time adapting to and becoming attached to other national cultures. By residing and conducting activities both in their home country and abroad, transmigrants have made their mark on the history of various nations. For both singers, family and professional ties to Poland and their local homeland of Lviv, alongside connections with America, Germany, and Austria-Hungary, are essential to understanding their careers. As in the case of other transmigrant artists, their success depended not only on talent and hard work but also on self-fashioning and the support of extensive networks involving family members, friends, teachers, and impresarios.

“The Land of Childhood”

Both singers settled in Lviv in the second half of the 19th century. Prakseda Marcelina Kochańska arrived there with her mother and brother after the death of her father (1873), a tanner who had earned his living as an organist and travelling musician. The reason for moving from Bolechów was to further the musical education of the talented fifteen-year-old, who had received her first violin and piano lessons from her father.

In Lviv, she was accepted to the conservatory of the Galician Music Society (GTM), where she honed her skills under the guidance of Wilhelm Stengel

Portrait of Marcella Sembrich

WARSAW, CA. 1880-1890



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(fortepiano) and Zygmunt Bruckmann (violin). To pay for her tuition, she accompanied Kornel Kawecki's dance lessons, who taught a course at Walentyna Horoszkiewiczowa's Educational and Scientific Institute for Women, played in private homes,¹ and received modest financial support from retired cashier Jan Radwan Janowicz. From the beginning of 1874, she studied Italian singing with Miss Destino (actually Józefa Suska). In the same year, she took part in several concerts: on March 13 and 15, she performed Bériot's fantasia on the violin during a GTM evening and a musical-dramatic morning, the proceeds of which were allocated to support the Fraternal Aid Society of Lviv academics. On May 10, she performed Thalberg's variations on a theme from Donizetti's

¹ See Zofia Horoszkiewiczówna, "O Marcelinie Sembrich-Kochańskiej: Pierwsi nauczyciele i pierwsze zarobki," *Kurier Literacko-Naukowy* 4, no. 43 (1935): 4, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/236060/edition/224483/content>.

Lelisir d'amore “exquisitely” in aid of the Uniate priests of Chełm.² “Miss K. possesses outstanding musical abilities: she plays the violin and the piano very beautifully. Skill, lightness, and at the same time strength of touch—these are the virtues of her playing. Mr. Stengel may be proud of his pupil,” wrote a critic in *Dziennik Polski*.³ Stengel was not only proud but also determined to provide Marcella with an education of the highest standard. Less than a year later, he organized a concert to cover the costs of her journey abroad, and journalists of *Kurier Polski* encouraged readers to offer generous support:

Perhaps one day, when Lviv takes pride in having brought her forth, many will look back with satisfaction, thinking: I helped ensure that such talent was not wasted for lack of support, and, in my own small way, I contributed to her development.⁴

The proceeds from ticket sales and subsequent concerts in the provinces significantly boosted the account of the financially modest student. Her finances were further supplemented by a special fund established by Berta Breuer (married name Ziembicka), a donation from Count Alfred Potocki, and finally, by scholarships for musical education in Vienna, which she received from the National Department of the Diet of Galicia and Lodomeria (the Galician Sejm) in 1875 and 1876. Thanks to this support, the plans and dreams of the student and her professor—who was also her protector and, from 1877, her husband—could come to fruition. “Seventeen-year-old Marcella Kochańska left Lviv in September 1875, accompanied by Stengel. She never doubted her bright future. Eleven years later, she returned here for performances, already a famous and wealthy artist, welcomed like a queen,” observed Małgorzata Komorowska, the singer’s biographer.⁵

Lola Beeth, on the other hand, was born in Kraków in 1860 (or 1864) as Leonora Karolina.⁶ She was the daughter of the Jewish merchant Maurycy Bett and Fanny (Fejga) Russmann. She came to Lviv with her parents as a one-year-old child and grew up in a relatively affluent family. She was sent to the prestigious

² Anon. “Koncert,” *Gazeta Lwowska* 64, no. 109 (1874): 3, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/23444/edition/17964/content>.

³ Anon. “Kronika teatralna,” *Dziennik Polski* 6, no. 111 (1874): 3, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/114436/edition/107078/content>.

⁴ Anon. “Wiadomości miejscowe,” *Kurier Polski* 1, no. 65 (1875): 1, https://digital.onb.ac.at/OnbViewer/viewer.faces-s?doc=ab0_%2bZ2546z86oX.

⁵ Małgorzata Komorowska and Juliusz Multarzyński, *Marcella Sembrich-Kochańska: Artystka świata* (Warszawa: Agencja Reklamowa Multart, 2016), 40–41.

⁶ These dates most frequently appear in biographies of Lola Beeth; in some sources, the years 1861, 1862, and 1863 are also mentioned.

Lola Beeth

LITHOGRAPH, CA. 1880–1885



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Horoszkiewicz Institute,⁷ where the boarder Kochańska accompanied for dance lessons. It is possible that they met there. Beeth received her first music lessons at home and later trained at the GTM Conservatory. Years later, she recalled: “At first in Lviv, at Mikuli’s school, I learned to play the piano. I also sang there, but very little.”⁸ In the spring of 1879, she performed in at least two concerts. On March 26, during a student recital at the conservatory, her solo performance in Eduard Lassen’s *Biblische Bilder* caused a stir:

The solo singing (soprano) of the very young student of the Society, Miss B., full of a strange purity, simplicity, and almost childlike tenderness, captivated the audience to such an extent that the applause seemed endless. Miss B.’s voice is a minor phenomenon on Lviv’s musical horizon, and local music enthusiasts have high hopes for her, believing that the fortunate owner of this talent will receive the

⁷ Jan Błęszyński, “Lola Beeth (Sylwetka),” in *Ilustrowany Kalendarz Teatralny Muza na rok 1893: Rocznik 2* (Lwów, 1892), <https://sbc.org.pl/dlibra/publication/5484/edition/5017/content>. The author notes that Gabriela Zapolska also studied at the Horoszkiewicz Institute.

⁸ Tr., “Z dnia: U Loli Beeth,” *Gazeta Wieczorna* 2, no. 626 (1912): 4, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/153937/edition/145731/content>.

enthusiastic applause as encouragement for further diligent work on her “treasure.” Judging by the young artist’s evident emotion and zeal, one may be confident that she grasps the noble aim of art and will not stop halfway; rather, after such a successful display of her talent, she will strive diligently to develop it further, caring less for easy applause than for art itself.⁹

The critic’s predictions proved entirely accurate. On April 3, during an amateur performance held for the benefit of St. Sophia’s Children’s Hospital, the young singer performed the role of Catherine in Albert Grisar’s operetta *Le chien du jardinier* (*The Gardener’s Dog*) in which

She electrified the audience with her marvelous voice . . . captivating and thrilling listeners with her nightingale-like tones. She played the role of a country coquette with such astonishing ease, energy, and humor that the audience repeatedly interrupted her performance with enthusiastic applause. Miss Bett’s perfectly pure soprano voice is truly a phenomenon in our city, and her talent is unmistakably clear.¹⁰

The founder of the hospital, Princess Jadwiga Sapieżyna, wife of the Marshal of the Galician Sejm, was convinced of this; she is said to have been the first to recognize Beeth’s vocal talent and enabled her to continue her education abroad from 1879 or 1880.

The early stages of the musical careers of both singers followed a similar path: making music within the family, recognition of their talent by their parents, the decision to send the daughters to a conservatory, early concerts that earned them public praise and sparked ambition, and finally efforts to study abroad, successfully realized thanks to Sejm scholarships, the generosity of patrons, and the support of audiences. In the 19th century, this was a typical path for a musical career. Adam Didur, Mira Heller, and many other singers followed a similar trajectory. It is worth noting that the situation was far more difficult for young theatre aspirants. Although the Polish theatre, especially in Warsaw, experienced a “star era” that elevated the most talented actors to prominence, dramatic art still did not enjoy recognition comparable to music. The Galician

⁹ B.K., “Notatki literacko-artystyczne,” *Gazeta Lwowska* 69, no. 72 (1879): 4, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/25738/edition/20284/content> (spelling modernized—M.Sz.).

¹⁰ H., “Przedstawienie amatorskie,” *Dziennik Polski* 12, no. 80 (1879): 2. Another critic was equally enthusiastic, see “Kronika miejscowa i zamiejscowa,” *Gazeta Narodowa* 18, no. 79 (1879): 3, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/81576/edition/75178/content>.

Sejm did not provide scholarships for acting studies, nor were aristocrats inclined to support the education of young performers of Melpomene abroad. Rare theatrical tours were financed either out of the actors' own pockets or from the directors' funds."¹¹ The privileged position of promising singers stemmed not only from the perception of music as a transnational art form but also from the conviction that studying with the best teachers abroad would serve as a gateway to an international career.

When leaving Lviv, the future prima donnas possessed a strong national identity, as well as experience in coexisting within multiple ethnic and cultural communities. The city, annexed by Austria in 1772, resisted Germanization and, after the promulgation of the December Constitution (1867), gained autonomy and developed into the most dynamic center of Polish science and culture under the partitions, alongside Kraków. Although the artists left the country before reaching twenty, in their mature lives they repeatedly demonstrated attachment to Poland. In Kochańska's case, this strong emotional bond was natural. The Bett family identified with the Jewish community, which constituted about one-third of Lviv's population. However, her education in Polish schools and participation in Polish cultural life provide grounds to believe that she also identified with Poland. In the future, it became clear that her Polish identity was indeed very strong.

Transmigrations

Educational Migration

Educational migration—that is, leaving one's country of birth to continue studies—was a natural stage in the development of talented artists living outside the world's main musical centers. Although it facilitated access to foreign stages, it did not necessarily mean a permanent departure from their homeland. Graduates of the Lviv Conservatory could consider returning to Galicia, particularly since traveling to Vienna kept them within the borders of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The Danubian capital, like Lviv but on a larger scale, was home to ethnically diverse communities of the multi-national Habsburg Empire. Consequently, the new city was not culturally alien to either artist; they encountered neither linguistic nor

¹¹ Helena Modrzejewska began her career in the provinces and went to Vienna with her then partner, actor and theatre director Gustaw Żimajer. In turn, Feliks Benda visited theatres in Paris and Vienna thanks to the director of the Kraków theatre, Stanisław Koźmian.

civilizational barriers. Moreover, they maintained close relationships with family members living in Vienna (the grandparents and uncles and aunts of Beeth)¹² as well as with acquaintances, including musicians from Stengel's circles.

Initially, Sembrich wanted to perfect her violin and fortepiano playing. However, her vocal talent was soon discovered and Victor Rokitansky, a former German opera singer in Lviv, took it upon himself to hone her skills. In 1876, the artist travelled to Milan to learn the *bel canto* singing technique from Giovanni Battista Lamperti, and the following year she was engaged by his brother Giuseppe to perform in Athens. She made her debut there on June 3, 1877 in the role of Elvira (Bellini's *I Puritani*), after which she sang it several times with great success and would probably have continued to do so until the end of the summer season if the impresario had not abandoned the artists without paying their fees. She returned to Vienna, where she developed a German repertoire with Richard Lewy, a singing teacher and director. In Paris, she consulted with the Frenchwoman Pauline Viardot-García, a representative of the Italian school of singing and author of vocal transcriptions of Chopin's mazurkas.¹³ In the mid-1880s, she went to Cernobbio in Lombardy, where she was taught by maestro Francesco Lamperti, the most famous of music teachers. According to a correspondent from Lviv, he was said to have been "smitten with Marcela Sembrich-Kochańska, who comes here every summer."¹⁴ Her teachers also included Maria Niemann-Seebach, a singer and actress from Dresden, and Mathilde de Castrone Marchesi, a German mezzo-soprano from Paris.

Lola Beeth prepared for her vocal career just as thoroughly, taking lessons from outstanding artists and teachers. In Vienna, she became a pupil of Marie Luise Dustmann, a German soloist at the Court Opera and the leading Wagnerian singer there, who later became a professor at the conservatory after retiring from her career. In the summer of 1883, the Lviv native's next teacher was Viardot-García, to whom, it was believed, "all outstanding singers owe their careers."¹⁵ She also consulted with Mathilde Marchesi in Paris, until she finally found her way to the master Francesco Lamperti. "A few months later [after Sembrich's visit] . . . Lola Beth arrived . . . and also received the most flattering

¹² See the obituary of Anna Bett (Lola's grandmother), who died on December 19, 1884 in Vienna, listing the names of family members, *Neue Freie Presse*, no. 7297 (1884): 18, <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=nfp&datum=18841221&seite=18&zoom=33>.

¹³ See a brief biography published after her death: "Paulina Viardot-García," *Kurier Lwowski* 28, no. 230 (afternoon edition) (1910): 5, <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=klw&datum=19100520&seite=9&zoom=33>.

¹⁴ Xen, "Villa Lamperti: Wspomnienie z podróży do Włoch," *Gazeta Narodowa* 26, no. 168 (1887): 1, <https://bjc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/82881/edition/76464/content>.

¹⁵ Błeszyński, "Lola Beeth."

Lola Beeth

LITHOGRAPH, CA. 1890–1895



© A. EHRLICH, BERÜHMTE SÄNGERINNEN (LEIPZIG, 1895)

opinion from the master”—reported a correspondent for *Gazeta Narodowa*.¹⁶ In Berlin, she also studied with the Hungarian soprano Rosa de Rudy (Bogya).

Both Polish women came into contact with outstanding teachers whose lessons were sought after by many future vocal stars. The competence, experience, and authority of these pedagogues had a decisive influence on the professional formation of their pupils: they shaped their singing styles, situated them within specific performance traditions, and often influenced their choice of repertoire. As a student of Lamperti, Sembrich was regarded as a representative of the Italian *bel canto* school. Beeth, after studying with Viardot-García, also referred to this tradition;¹⁷ however, as a pupil of Dustmann, she was particularly esteemed for her interpretations of Wagner’s works. Singing teachers also acted as trusted advisors in matters of career development and provided concrete assistance in

¹⁶ Xen., “Villa Lamperti,” 1.

¹⁷ Tr., “Z dnia: U Loli Beeth,” 4.

securing employment. When Sembrich failed to obtain a position at the Vienna Court Opera, Lewy intervened on her behalf, asking Franz Wüllner, conductor of the Saxon Royal Opera in Dresden, to audition her. She also received support from Viardot-García, who, impressed by her singing, invited her to perform in her musical salon and advised her to travel to Dresden, providing her with a letter of recommendation to Julius Rietz, Wüllner's predecessor as court kapellmeister.¹⁸ Although Rietz died before he could hire the singer, his successor—having heard Sembrich in Vienna—offered her guest performances. Following her debut on 23 September 1878 at the Dresden Hofoper (Königliches Opernhaus) in the title role of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, she was engaged by the theatre.

Lola Beeth likewise benefited from the protection and active support of her mentor. In the spring of 1881, Dustmann organized a series of concerts in Vienna at which the Polish singer performed songs and operatic arias by Verdi and Wagner. Not only her exceptional voice but also her beauty were widely praised.¹⁹ News of her success soon reached Lviv: as early as May 1881, *Gazeta Narodowa* reported that Beeth had left for Berlin with her teacher and was engaged by the local opera house.²⁰ Before this engagement materialized, she auditioned for Botho von Hülsen, the general director of the Berlin theatres, who offered her guest performances. Beeth made her debut at the Royal Saxon Opera on 25 March 1882 as Elsa in Wagner's *Lohengrin*, and a few days later she appeared as Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust*, delighting both audiences and critics. Following the success of these performances, it became clear that she would remain in Berlin for an extended period.

The choice of teachers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds—first within Austria-Hungary and later beyond the borders of the Empire—opened up prospects for transnational careers for Polish soloists. These pedagogues created networks of personal and professional connections that also included their young students. Transnational in character, these networks were sustained by the unquestioned renown of the masters and mistresses, which extended well beyond their countries of origin. Consequently, studying with Lamperti did not predetermine a career confined to Italy, nor did training under Viardot-García limit her pupils to France. For the most talented among them, the greatest opera stages of Europe and overseas lay open.

¹⁸ This "Dresden connection," citing Sembrich's own recollections, was noted by the singer and pedagogue Anna Eugénie Schoen-René, *America's Musical Inheritance: Memories and Reminiscences* (New York: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1941): 180–181.

¹⁹ Anon. "Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur," *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 411 (1881): 6, <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=waz&datum=18810414&seite=6&zoom=33>.

²⁰ Anon. "Panna Lola Beet," *Gazeta Narodowa* 20, no. 121 (1881): 3.

Permanent Emigration

When Sembrich was employed in Dresden and Beeth in Berlin, their intensive educational migration, which determined their future fate, came to an end, and a period of professional and economic migration began. This stage was characterized by full-season contracts or guest performances on opera stages around the world, intertwined with phases of establishing, expanding and deepening family and friendship ties in successive locations. Both singers became transmigrants who identified both with Poland and with the countries where they settled.

For Sembrich, the first contract—signed for two seasons in the Saxon capital—brought a measure of stability. She decided to settle in Dresden together with her husband, who managed her career as both advisor and impresario. This choice was largely shaped by family considerations: Wilhelm Stengel's mother and brother lived in Dresden, and the latter offered him employment in a lithographic firm as well as assistance with caring for his son, born in 1878. Dresden remained a significant point on the singer's migration map. The wealth she amassed—primarily through performances in Russia in the early 1880s—enabled her to build a villa there, to which she regularly returned between engagements and where she spent holidays and periods of rest. Over the years, she continued to give recitals and concerts for local audiences, maintaining a strong presence in the city until the end of her operatic career in 1909. Although the greater part of her professional life was associated with performances in the United States, she emigrated permanently across the Atlantic only many years after retiring from the stage. Significantly, following her death, the ashes of both the artist and her husband were brought from America to Dresden and interred in the Stengel family tomb at Johannisfriedhof cemetery.

Lola Beeth settled in Berlin with her sister Rosa Landsmann, who moved there from Prague after separating from her husband. Perhaps Rosa also acted as her manager. It is not known how long the sisters lived and worked together. Beeth's ties to the city of her first engagement appear to have been weaker than Sembrich's, perhaps because she did not establish a family there. After six seasons, she returned to Vienna, one of the most significant places in her life. Toward the end of her career, at the turn of the twentieth century, she relocated once again to Germany, purchasing a villa on the outskirts of Berlin, where she lived until her death in 1940.²¹ Berlin was also most likely the place of her burial.

²¹ Reports appeared claiming that, because of her Jewish origins, Lola Beeth was forced to leave Nazi Germany and died in Switzerland; see Aleksandra Dudek, "Stefania Różycka śpiewaczka, tłumaczka, dziennikarka, nauczycielka," *Szkoła Artystyczna* 15, no. 3 (2021): 223, <https://www.gov.pl/web/cea/szkola-artystyczna>. However, the German Wikipedia page cites her death certificate from a Berlin hospital; "Lola Beeth," *Wikipedia*, accessed 12 October 2025, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lola_Beeth.

Artistic Career: Development Strategies and Pathways

In their pursuit of international fame, Polish singers conformed to the expectations of an era that idolized prima donnas not only for their exceptional voices and beauty but also for their distinctive stage personas—haughty, yet respectful and eager to win the sympathy of an audience diverse in both national and social terms. Both soloists quickly modified their names to ones that sounded more cosmopolitan. Kochańska first appeared in Greece under the name Bosio and later adopted her mother's Julianna maiden name, Sembrich, a decision that met with disapproval among her compatriots, who were sensitive to questions of national identity. A critic in *Echo Muzyczne* hinted at accusations "that she was abandoning the name Kochańska,"²² while a columnist for *Kłósy* lamented, "Ah! It was not right to despise a Polish surname, it was not right,"²³ and a reporter for *Kurier Warszawski* sighed, "A foreign surname is nice, but one's own is nicest!"²⁴ Such unfavorable commentary subsided only when, as an artist of international renown, she consistently demonstrated her attachment to her homeland. The Polish press thereafter never omitted her original surname, presenting her as Marcelina (Marcella) Sembrich-Kochańska. Karolina Bett, upon entering the international stage, altered the spelling of her surname to Beeth (perhaps because in German, Bett means "bed") and adopted a shortened, diminutive form of her first name. These comparatively minor changes passed largely unnoticed in Poland.²⁵

Sembrich "realized early in her career that an artist needs a public image," notes Małgorzata Komorowska, discussing her strategy of self-creation.²⁶ She argues that she skillfully exploited the opportunities offered by the media of her time—such as the press, posters, portraits, photographs, and gramophone recordings—and even employed Justyn Połujański, who was responsible for "leaking" various kinds of information, both official and gossipy. Moreover, Komorowska emphasizes that "Sembrich knew how to win the audience's graces," citing as an example the diva's practice, during her American tours, of choosing well-known songs such as *Home, Sweet Home* and *Some Day* as encores:

²² Anon. *Echo Muzyczne* 4, no. 13 (1880): 108, <https://crispa.uw.edu.pl/object/files/188146/display/Default>.

²³ Quis [Marian Gawalewicz], "Pokłosie," *Kłósy* 34, no. 870 (1882): 138, <https://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra/publication/117808/edition/128594/content>.

²⁴ Anon. "Mile cudze nazwisko, lecz swoje najmiłsze!," *Kurier Warszawski* 63, no. 208a (1883): 3, <https://academica.edu.pl/reading/readSingle?cid=114107962&uid=113237538>.

²⁵ Various spellings of the singer's surname can be found in the press: Bett, Bettówna, Beet, Beth, and Beeth.

²⁶ Komorowska and Multarzyński, *Marcella Sembrich-Kochańska*, 25.

Lola Beeth

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The audience often joined in singing with the artist, who, through her smile and gestures, underscored the broader meaning of the lyrics—invoking the happiness of being “at home,” (understood as being in that very city and place where the concert was taking place), as well as the hope of meeting again (“one day” she would return to sing there). She adapted both her concert programs and encores to the language of the audiences she addressed, performing different songs in England, France, America, Russia, Spain, and Poland.²⁷

Sembrich also actively sought the favor of critics, fully aware of the influence their opinions exerted on public reception. She generally maintained good relations with both European and American reviewers, and in some cases, these professional contacts developed into close friendships. Among them was the

²⁷ Komorowska and Multarzyński, 26.

influential Eduard Hanslick of the *Neue Freie Presse* in Vienna, who—according to *Gazeta Narodowa*—after Sembrich’s performance in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, “spoke with the utmost admiration of our artist’s singing and acting.”²⁸

Talented, exceptionally beautiful, and unmarried, Lola Beeth for a time received more media attention than Sembrich, who was determined to protect her family life.²⁹ Portraits of the striking young artist were in high demand: one owner of an art magazine in Warsaw announced that they were available for purchase alongside photographs of crowned heads and figures distinguished in the fields of technology and the arts.³⁰ Beeth was also frequently sought after for participation in advertising campaigns.³¹ The press showed particular interest in the question of her marriage. At the beginning of 1892, reports claimed that she was to marry the comedy writer and librettist Ludwik Doczi, an Austrian court counsellor of Hungarian Jewish origin.³² Two years later, rumors circulated that her future husband would be an Austrian count.³³ Another, more controversial career-building strategy was suggested by Kazimierz Chłędowski, a high-ranking Viennese official and diarist known for his fondness for gossip and caustic commentary. He insinuated that Beeth “hunted . . . old excellencies, section heads, former ministers, in order to gain protection, flirting with them with her ample bosom.” He seemingly softened his slanders by adding insinuations about physical deficiencies, writing: “She nevertheless lived very righteously, and it was even said that certain physical defects prevented her from marrying.”³⁴ Beeth was, however, fortunate in her relationships with influential critics, especially at the beginning of her career, when youthful beauty coincided with an excellent voice. The aforementioned Eduard Hanslick—then over sixty years old—was, according to a Polish correspondent, “as enthusiastic as a young zealot. He calls her a Madonna and predicts the most brilliant future for her voice, which he already finds impressive.”³⁵

²⁸ An account of Sembrich’s performance in Vienna on 24 March 1887, anon. “Teatr,” *Gazeta Narodowa* 26, no. 72 (1887): 3, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/82696/edition/76281/content>.

²⁹ Ski, “Lola Beeth,” *Kurier Codzienny* 23, no. 239 (1887): 3, <https://academica.edu.pl/reading/readSingle?page--=1&uid=42421691>.

³⁰ See the advertisement of Zygmunt Muszkat’s art gallery published in *Kurier Codzienny* 25, no. 94 (1889): 8, <https://academica.edu.pl/reading/readSingle?cid=44200439&uid=42422269>.

³¹ At the turn of the century, Beeth’s name (it is unclear whether this was done with the artist’s consent) appeared in newspaper advertisements for Marczello and Klythia face powders, as well as for the hair-washing powder Javol.

³² See Anon. “Panna Lola Beeth,” *Kurier Lwowski* 10, no. 34 (1892): 3, <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?a-id=klw&datum=18920203&seite=3&zoom=33>, among others.

³³ Anon. “Lola Beeth,” *Kurier Warszawski* 74, no. 192 (1894): 3, <https://academica.edu.pl/reading/readSingle?page--=3&uid=19306863>.

³⁴ Kazimierz Chłędowski, *Pamiętniki: Wiedeń 1881–1901*, vol. 2, 2nd expanded edition (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1957), 125.

³⁵ Ski, “Lola Beeth,” 3.

With increasing talent and artistic success, singers came to rely not only on family and teachers but also on impresarios and opera directors when shaping their careers. Once artists achieved renown, they no longer needed to seek auditions or negotiate contracts themselves; instead, they became the focus of agencies eager to secure their services for performances at leading opera houses. At the turn of the century, impresarios operated extensively across Europe and America, with London serving as their principal center of activity. It was there that Sembrich fell into the “clutches of agents”³⁶ in 1883, finding herself among internationally diverse musicians who were actively sought after and professionally managed. At the same time, two ambitious impresarios—Henry Abbey and James Henry Mapleson—were locked in a “truly Darwinian struggle for singers,”³⁷ competing to bring leading artists to the United States for performances. The contract Sembrich signed with Abbey opened the way for her overseas career. She subsequently concluded contracts for performances in Europe with representatives of the most influential agencies, with their terms negotiated by Stengel. In London, opera seasons featuring Sembrich were organized by the brothers Ernest and Herbert Gye, and later by Augustus Harris; in Berlin by Hermann Wolff; and in Vienna by Ignaz Kugel and Franz von Jauner. In Russia, opera companies performed with artists engaged by Eugeni Merelli, Alberto Visentini, and David Nirstein, all of whom consistently offered Sembrich highly lucrative contracts.

It may be assumed that Lola Beeth had similar experiences, although little is known about her negotiations with impresarios. In the summer of 1884, at the outset of her career, reports appeared in the press concerning a contract for performances at Covent Garden with a group of German singers, primarily in the Wagnerian repertoire. The project was organized by the impresario Hermann Franke in collaboration with the English impresario Ernest Gye, who had engaged Sembrich on the London stage. Beeth was forced to decline the invitation, as the management of the Berlin Court Opera refused to grant her leave.³⁸ This episode is significant, since the proposed performances might have constituted a turning point in her career. By presenting her signature Wagnerian roles in London, Beeth would have had the opportunity to attract the attention of American impresarios seeking soloists for German opera, which at the time

³⁶ The term is taken from the title of a chapter in the monograph “‘Druga Patti’ w szponach agentów” (‘The Second Patti’ in the Clutches of Agents), Komorowska and Multarzyński, *Marcella Sembrich-Kochańska*, 72–107.

³⁷ Anon. “W Londynie,” *Czas* 36, no. 129 (1883): 3, <http://mbc.malopolska.pl/dlibra/publication?id=32828&tab=3>.

³⁸ This is the information that reached Lviv, anon. “Wiadomości literackie i artystyczne,” *Dziennik Polski* 17, no. 128 (1884): 2, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/109031/edition/101890/content>.

dominated the repertoire of the Metropolitan Opera. Instead, Beeth made her debut in New York only a decade later.

The artistic migration routes of both singers were remarkable. While still bound by a two-year contract in Dresden, Sembrich gave concerts in other German cities, including Leipzig, Berlin, and Cologne, as well as in Milan, Warsaw, and Vienna. In 1880, after the contract expired, she left for London, where she appeared with the Royal Italian Opera at Covent Garden. During the 1880/81 and 1882/83 seasons, she performed at the Italian Opera of the Imperial Theatres in St Petersburg and Moscow, as well as in Madrid, while continuing to return regularly to London. After signing a lucrative contract, Sembrich made her Metropolitan Opera debut on 24 October 1883 in the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, becoming the sensation of the season. Largely owing to her success, the newly opened theatre began to rival the long-established Academy of Music. A few months later, after returning to Europe, she sang to great acclaim in Paris, Madrid, Lisbon, and Berlin, a city in which she performed almost annually and where she purchased a house in 1903. Her extensive touring also included Hamburg, Wrocław, Vienna (on several occasions), Prague, major Russian cities, Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Oslo. In the 1893/94 season, she appeared in Monte Carlo alongside Jan and Edward Reszke. Following a series of concerts in American cities in 1898, she accepted another engagement at the Metropolitan Opera and, with the exception of the 1900/01 season—when she toured the United States with her own opera company—continued to enjoy great success on the New York stage until 1909. At a gala performance on 6 February 1909, she celebrated her twenty-fifth anniversary as an artist and officially concluded her operatic career. She subsequently embarked on a farewell tour of Europe, visiting cities where she had achieved her greatest successes, including Vienna, Berlin, and St Petersburg. In her later years, she continued to appear in concerts and recitals.

After appearing in Berlin in 1882, Lola Beeth signed a three-year contract that was subsequently extended for a further three seasons. Alongside her engagements on her home stage, she participated in a concert conducted by Eugène d'Albert in Wrocław in 1884 and also performed in Dresden. In the spring of 1887, following two concerts in Paris, she was scheduled to give a series of performances at the Opéra-Comique; however, these were cancelled owing to a fire that destroyed the building. In the same year, at the invitation of Wilhelm Jahn, conductor and director of the Vienna Court Opera, Beeth appeared there in the roles of Elsa in Wagner's *Lohengrin*, Mrs. Fluth in Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust*. Her success secured her a two-year engagement beginning in May 1888, which was later extended until the

end of the 1894/95 season. Despite her permanent appointment in Vienna, she did not abandon her artistic travels. In March 1890 she performed in Budapest, and in the summer of 1891, she appeared at the Kroll Theatre in Berlin, where Sembrich was also giving concerts (the two singers may have met on stage). In the autumn of the following year, Beeth sang at the Paris Opera before the President of France, foreign ambassadors, and members of the Polish émigré community. While she was praised for her “beautiful voice, refined taste, noble style, and dramatic interpretation,”³⁹ some critics also remarked that her voice lacked sufficient power for the size and acoustics of the hall. In February 1894, she performed in Monte Carlo and Nice; in June she took part in the Gounod Festival in Paris; and toward the end of the year, she was scheduled to appear in Romania. In April 1895, at her farewell performance at the Vienna Court Opera, Beeth was “called back to the stage no fewer than forty times, amid an abundance of flowers.”⁴⁰ In June she again appeared before the Parisian audience as Venus in Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*,⁴¹ and in October, during a banquet held in honor of the King of Portugal, she delighted the monarch with her portrayal of Juliette in Gounod’s *Roméo et Juliette*.⁴² In New York, on 2 December, she inaugurated her appearances at the Metropolitan Opera with her favorite role of Elsa, which she had to master in Italian within a short period of time; this adversely affected her performance and was reflected in the critics’ reviews. In subsequent seasons, however, Beeth achieved considerable success on the New York stage in Wagnerian roles, including Elisabeth (*Tannhäuser*), Sieglinde (*Die Walküre*), and Eva (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*), earning her far more favorable reviews and the reputation of a leading soprano at the Metropolitan Opera. She appeared there on several occasions alongside the Reszke brothers and, as a memento, presented Jan with a photograph inscribed: “To my beloved compatriot, the greatest tenor of the century, with admiration and friendship.”⁴³ In the summer of 1896, Beeth continued her career in London, singing Sieglinde

³⁹ B.a. “Z teatru,” *Kurier Warszawski* 72, no. 305 (1892): 3, <https://academica.edu.pl/reading/readSingle?page=-3&uid=19303763>. A correspondent for *Czas* also noted this, adding: “Her voice has a strange charm and accent, especially in the higher registers, and thanks to this, combined with her exceptionally precise diction, she made a great impression here, and thunderous applause greeted the artist every time the curtain fell!” M., “Korespondencja Czasu,” *Czas* 45, no. 257 (1892): 2, <http://mbc.malopolska.pl/dlibra/publication?id=35868&tab=3>.

⁴⁰ B-Dunn, “Nowiny wiedeńskie,” *Dziennik Polski* 28, no. 109 (1895): 2, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/138104/edition/130122/content>.

⁴¹ Puk [Alfred Nossig?], “Listy paryskie,” *Gazeta Lwowska* 85, no. 146 (1895): 4, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/20769/edition/15231/content>.

⁴² Anon. “Raut muzyczny,” *Słowo* 14, no. 251 (1895): 3, <https://academica.edu.pl/reading/readSingle?page=3&uid=15765309>.

⁴³ Anon. “Album pamiątek Jana Reszkego,” *Czas* 49, no. 225 (1896): 2, <http://mbc.malopolska.pl/publication/37084>.

at Covent Garden, before touring further to Monte Carlo, St Petersburg, Moscow, and Riga. During the 1898/99 and 1900/01 seasons, she rejoined the ensemble of the Vienna Court Opera. The culmination of her career on the Danube was the conferment of the honorary title of court singer (*Kammersängerin*) in 1901. In later years, she appeared only occasionally in concerts on European stages.

Connections with Their Homeland

Sembrich and Beeth did not sever their ties with Poland. Sembrich, in particular, maintained lively contacts with her compatriots both at home and abroad, as evidenced by her extensive correspondence preserved at the New York Public Library. “She is always ready to offer moral or material support to her compatriots who need her advice and help,” wrote Maurycy Karasowski, a musician living in Dresden.⁴⁴ One of her earliest visits she made was to Józef Ignacy Kraszewski. She travelled relatively frequently to perform in Polish cities, including Warsaw (1879, 1880, 1886, 1889, 1895, 1909), Kraków (1886, 1898, 1909), and Vilnius (1883, 1886, 1890, 1895, 1909). In 1884, she performed for Polish holidaymakers in Sopot and donated part of her honorarium to the November Uprising fund.⁴⁵ She also visited Lviv in 1886 and 1909, delighting local audiences with “her untouched Lviv accent.”⁴⁶ Sembrich was received with great honors: official receptions were organized by national and municipal authorities, she was lavishly entertained in private salons, and tickets for her performances sold out despite their exorbitant prices. A significant portion of her earnings was donated to charitable causes, including individuals, institutions, and associations (she contributed a substantial sum to her alma mater, the GTM Conservatory, to fund scholarships for students).

It is significant that, on stages around the world, Sembrich performed Chopin’s song *The Wish* in Polish at almost every concert (incipit: “Gdybym ja była słońcem na niebie”). Despite her change of surname, audiences recognized her as a Polish singer, affectionately calling her the “Polish nightingale.” After the outbreak of the First World War, she increasingly emphasized her nationality. Like Paderewski, she became an ambassador for the Polish cause, helping to

⁴⁴ Maurycy Karasowski, “Kochańska,” *Kurier Codzienny* 25, no. 325 (1889): 3, <https://academica.edu.pl/reading/readSingle?page=2&uid=42422500>.

⁴⁵ Anon. *Kurier Polski w Paryżu* 4, no. 19 (1884): 5, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/451180/edition/426520/content>.

⁴⁶ Stanisław Niewiadomski, “Marcella Sembrich,” *Scena Polska* 9, no. 5 (1929): 13, <https://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra/publication/301082/edition/268418/content>.

promote its presence on the international stage.⁴⁷ In her efforts to support the restoration of Poland's independence, Sembrich served as the honorary president of the American Polish Relief Committee of New York. Her initiatives raised thousands of dollars through charity concerts, recitals, and cultural events, beginning with the patriotic spectacle *A Night in Poland* (8 April 1915). Modelled on *tableaux vivants*, the event presented Americans with the rich history and culture of a country that, at the time, no longer appeared on European maps.⁴⁸ In recognition of her services, the independent Republic of Poland awarded her a certificate of Polish nationality in 1919, signed by the Polish National Committee in Paris, and, in 1924, the Order of Polonia Restituta.

Lola Beeth also demonstrated a strong attachment to the country of her childhood, although she did not engage in as many activities on its behalf as Sembrich. From the moment she arrived in Vienna, she was a frequent participant in Polish social circles. The patronage of Princess Sapieha enabled her to establish connections with representatives of the upper classes who held prominent positions in central government offices. In February 1881, she attended a Polish ball hosted by Count Jerzy Dunin-Borkowski and the sons of her patron, Princes Paweł and Leon Sapieha. Among the guests were government ministers, ambassadors, parliamentarians, generals, and senior officials. As her artistic career progressed, Beeth increasingly initiated such gatherings herself. "She does not close her salon to her compatriots, as she enjoys Polish conversation; on the contrary, she welcomes them warmly and is as distinguished a hostess in her own home as she is a highly esteemed guest in the highest circles,"⁴⁹ reported a correspondent for *Świat*. In Vienna, Beeth actively participated in Polish cultural events. She performed several times during the traditional Mickiewicz Evenings, including on 23 January 1899, marking the centenary of the poet's birth, at a concert commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Chopin's death (1899), and in charity performances, such as those organized after the crop failure in Galicia (1890). In 1892, she became involved in organizing the International Music and Theatre Exhibition, which showcased the achievements of European theatres. She contributed to the work of the "ladies committee" under the leadership of Countess Elżbieta Potocka née Radziwiłł, and on 7 May, after the exhibition was

⁴⁷ For Sembrich's activities on behalf of Poland, see Komorowska and Multarzyński, *Marcella Sembrich-Kochańska*, 279–305.

⁴⁸ For a description of the performance, see Komorowska and Multarzyński, *Marcelina Sembrich-Kochańska*, 293–298; Mariola Szydtowska "Amerykańskie sezony teatralne Ryszarda Ordyńskiego 1915–1920," *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 50, no. 3/4 (2001): 132–134.

⁴⁹ Leporello, "Lola Beeth," *Świat* 4, no. 1 (1891): 18, <http://mbc.malopolska.pl/dlibra/docmetadata?id=53676&from=publication>.



Trzy Humoreski by Stanisław Niewiadomski, dedicated to Lola Beeth

CA. 1893



Sembrich-valse: pour le piano by E. Pawlikovsky, dedicated to Marcella Sembrich

CA. 1890

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opened by Emperor Franz Joseph, she guided the monarch through the Polish section, accompanied by Ludwik Wodzicki and Zygmunt Cieszkowski. A series of planned performances for the event, featuring Modrzejewska, Sembrich, the Reszke brothers, Beeth, and Irena Abendroth, ultimately did not take place. In February 1893, Beeth performed compositions by Władysław Żeleński, conducted by the composer himself, in the hall of the Musikverein Society.⁵⁰

Lola Beeth rarely visited Poland. She cancelled her performances in Kraków twice, and on her way back from Riga, she only visited Warsaw and Łódź. On 9 January 1898, she performed several opera arias and songs by Żeleński and Jan Gall at the capital's town hall. She delighted audiences with her beautiful voice and stage presence, but she also received comments that “there is no poignancy in her singing that touches the heart, there is little freedom and sincerity of feeling,

⁵⁰ For Władysław Żeleński's concert featuring Beeth, see Michał Jaczyński “Wykonania muzyki Władysława Żeleńskiego w Wiedniu,” *Edukacja Muzyczna*, no. 10 (2015): 163–180, <http://dx.doi.org/10.16926/em.2015.10.09>; see also a facsimile edition of the musical score originally published in Wien in 1897: Władysław Żeleński, *Goplana: Opera romantyczna w trzech aktach; Partytura orkiestrowa* (Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki pan, 2016), vol. 1, 24–26, https://www.academia.edu/42807998/Introduction_to_the_1st_volume_W%C5%82adys%C5%82aw_W%C5%BBele%C5%84ski_Goplana_Opera_romantyczna_w_3_aktach_Libretto_Ludom%C5%82_German_Partytura_orkiestrowa_Wien_1897_Wydanie_faksymilowe_Goplana_Ro-mantic_opera_in_3_acts_Libretto_by_Ludo-m%C5%82_German_Orchestral_score_Vienna_1897_Facsimile_edition_.

and above all, her voice lacks what the Germans call *schmelz* [sweetness].”⁵¹ She was treated with great attention. She accepted an invitation to a reception in honor of Żeleński, during which she sang with Janina Korolewicz and Wiktor Grąbczewski. Unfortunately, Lviv was not included in her tour, but during her greatest successes she was constantly present there (as was Sembrich) through the media of the time: the press and the telegraph. News of the triumphs of “the Lviv singer, Lola Beeth,” as she was described, came from the foreign press or from reports by Polish correspondents, who were particularly numerous in Vienna. No wonder that the grateful residents of Lviv wanted to honor their fellow countrywoman. Several composers dedicated musical works to her: Stanisław Niewiadomski: *Trzy humoreski* (Three Humoresques), Maurycy Fall: *Lola Beeth Gavotte*, Aleksander Kleiner: the song *Chcę się zapytać, ty serce moje* (I Want to Ask You, My Heart), Jan Gall: *Poleciały pieśni moje*⁵² (My Songs Have Taken Wing), and *Chanson d’amour*. Some of them were published with musical notation, while others were performed at concerts. The artist did not arrive in Lviv until 1912, after the end of her stage career, on a private visit. “I wanted to visit my sister, and above all, visit the grave of my mother, who recently passed away here,” she confided to a journalist, adding: “Lviv has developed tremendously and become more beautiful, more European . . . I will take with me the most pleasant memories and impressions of the city.”⁵³ But Lviv—both its Polish and Jewish inhabitants—had already almost forgotten about her, because she disappeared from the press shortly after her farewell to the stage.

Little is known about Beeth’s connections to the Jewish community. The author of *Das Jüdische Weib*, published at the end of the 19th century, asserted that Beeth remained devoted to her father’s faith and to her sister, who always accompanied her.⁵⁴ In 1901, Beeth converted to Protestantism,⁵⁵ a change that coincided with the court’s declaration of Maurice Bett as mentally ill.⁵⁶ These events may have been connected.

⁵¹ Br.N., “Przegląd Muzyczny,” *Prawda* 18, no. 3 (1898): 35, <https://bcu.lib.uni.lodz.pl/dlibra/publication/56230/edition/49177/content>.

⁵² The music for Maria Konopnicka’s poem *Poleciały pieśni moje* was also composed by Władysław Żeleński, who dedicated the work to “Mrs. Marcelina Sembrich-Kochańska” (1889).

⁵³ Tr., “Z dnia: U Loli Beeth,” 4.

⁵⁴ See Nahida Ruth Lazarus (Nahida Remy), *Das jüdische Weib: Mit einer Vorrede von Prof. Dr. M. Lazarus* (Berlin, 1896), 262, <https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/freimann/content/pageview/554127>.

⁵⁵ See Anna L. Staudacher, *Jüdisch-protestantische Konvertiten in Wien 1782–1914* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 58.

⁵⁶ By a ruling of the District Court in Lviv on 28 May 1901, Dr. Henryk Mehrer, his son-in-law, was appointed guardian of Maurycy Bett; see anon. “Kuratele,” *Gazeta Lwowska* 91, no. 139 (1901): 12, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/27309/edition/21873/content>, among others.

The Twilight of Life: Legacy and Memory

Marcella Sembrich, after her husband's death and the end of the Great War, did not return either to her country of origin—now a free Poland—or to the country of her first professional migration, Germany. In a devastated and demoralized Europe, particularly in defeated Germany, financial conditions were unfavorable. In Nice, she lost her newly built residence due to restrictions imposed by the French authorities on German citizens, though she managed to bring some of her more valuable possessions with her from Dresden. She ultimately chose the United States as her next destination, where she took up teaching positions at the Juilliard School of Music in New York and later at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. She was widely admired for her contributions to American musical life. To this day, she is regarded as one of the most famous singers of the late 19th century, a leading figure of the “golden age of the Metropolitan Opera” (her portrait still hangs in the opera foyer), and a master of *bel canto* with an extraordinary coloratura voice. “Anyone who would want to describe Madame Sembrich's singing exhaustively would have to write an entire book about singing,”⁵⁷ argued H.W. Henderson in *The New York Times*. She performed in Italian, French, and German operas, particularly works by Mozart, though she tended to avoid Wagner. Her stage partners included some of the most outstanding singers of her era: Enrico Caruso, the Reszke brothers, and, in her final season, Adam Didur from Lviv. In 1920, she obtained American citizenship, and two years later she built a house and vocal studio in Lake George (Bolton Landing). Sembrich devoted herself to training talented young musicians, working with singers, music teachers, and, following the example of her own mentors, not only developing their voices but also guiding their professional careers. She taught in music schools, in her own apartment, and in her studio, offering consultations to renowned singers such as Alma Gluck, and training students including Queena Mario, Dusolina Giannini, Maria Jeritza, Natalie Bodanya, Annamary Dickey, and Lucielle Browning—many of whom went on to become soloists at the Metropolitan Opera. While the exact impact of Sembrich's patronage is difficult to quantify, her reputation and mentorship undoubtedly helped her students gain access to the world's leading stages. In later years, most of her students pursued careers in music education. She recommended several of them to the Curtis Institute of Music, where they passed on the Italian singing technique and artistry they had learned from her to subsequent generations.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Carl H. Hiller, “Polacy na scenie Metropolitan Opera (I),” *Dziennik Związkowy / Polish Daily Zgoda* 76, no. 147 (1983): 7, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/731926/edition/693307/content>.

The memory of the “Polish Nightingale” remains alive in the United States. Her former vocal studio on Lake George now houses the Marcella Sembrich Opera Museum, which preserves and displays memorabilia of the artist. The Marcella Sembrich Memorial Association is also active there, organizing summer concerts, musical gatherings, and other events. The Marcella Sembrich International Voice Competition for young singers are held. In Poland, the prima donna’s legacy has been commemorated through publications and exhibitions by Małgorzata Komorowska and Juliusz Multarzyński.

Time has been less kind to the memory of Lola Beeth. She has never been the subject of a monograph or academic study, and many people are not even aware that she was Polish. Although she was considered inferior to Marcella Sembrich in terms of talent and fame, Beeth was highly esteemed in certain circles—particularly in opera theatres in German-speaking countries—and for specific roles, especially leading parts in Wagner’s operas. It was even said that she was made for them. As one musical authority, Aleksander Rajchman, observed, for the interpretation of Wagnerian characters, “in addition to her musicality, reflecting the pedantic nuances of Wagnerism, [her] external individuality was also a great fit.”⁵⁸ In 1890, Cosima Wagner, the composer’s widow, visited Vienna to attend a performance of *Tannhäuser* with Beeth, seeking singers for the Bayreuth season. A journalist from *Gazeta Polska* mocked the situation: “Unfortunately, Miss Beeth is Jewish, and Germanic chauvinism demands that only *unverfälschte Germanen* perform in the works of the great master.”⁵⁹ Five years later, Wagner’s son, Siegfried, travelled to Paris to see Beeth perform. Her Wagnerian repertoire, along with her career in Berlin and Vienna—where Beeth’s artistic migration routes converged and diverged—led critics at times to regard her as a German singer.⁶⁰

After retiring, she devoted herself to teaching. She settled in the prestigious artistic district of Grunewald in Berlin, in a large villa purchased with the earnings from her American career. There, she ran a singing school, teaching according to the Italian method and the Viardot-García tradition. Among her students was Stefania Mławska, wife of Ludomir Różycki, who later became a singer, teacher, and author of vocal pedagogy textbooks.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Al.R. [Aleksander Rajchman], “Lola Beethówna,” *Echo Muzyczne, Teatralne i Artystyczne* 7, no. 357 (1890): 357, <https://academica.edu.pl/reading/readSingle?page=4&uid=67745101>.

⁵⁹ Adin., “Listki wieńskie,” *Gazeta Polska*, no. 65 (1890): 1, <https://academica.edu.pl/reading/readSingle?cid=18665416&uid=14787748>.

⁶⁰ See, e.g. anon. “The World of Music,” *Munsey’s Magazine* 14, no. 3 (1895): 281.

⁶¹ Stefania Różycka recalled Lola Beeth with gratitude, also appreciating the fact that she did not charge fees to her poorest students. Różycka introduced Beeth’s legacy to Lviv, where in 1909 she ran a school of singing, and later to Silesia, where after 1945 she taught at the Ignacy Jan Paderewski Music Institute in Gliwice (now the

The artistic biographies of Marcella Sembrich and Lola Beeth exemplify transnational migration. Having left their hometowns and homeland at a young age, they crossed multiple national borders throughout their adult lives, establishing themselves in countries with diverse cultures and political systems, while maintaining ties to their native land. Their experiences as transmigrants were not an isolated phenomenon in the musical world at the turn of the 20th century, where mobility represented a natural career trajectory for the most talented individuals.

Translated by Katarzyna Szuster-Tardi



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