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MAGAZINE

Singing Americe

Guido Salmaggi

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SHOWCASE

a turn out west — way out for its foreign consuls at age west. One morning in 1959, the 70 and a new vice consul will director of the Honolulu Symphony looked him up while in New York for some help in roducing opera in Hawaii. Salmaggi jumped at the chance and for the next five years did all the lead-role casting for the Honolulu Symphony Opera as its artistic advisor. He flew to Honolulu for two weeks during every production while maintaining

Then in 1969, Mayor Frank Fasi hired him to be the city and county's director of auditoriums and moved him to Hawaii. The position was short-lived, though, as Salmaggi walked off the job. disgruntled over administrative interference. "It became a political thing, and I resigned because I didn't like politics,' he says matter-of-factly.

his career in New York.

Despite his rift with the city. Salmaggi's government career was only beginning. Gov. John Burns asked him if he would consider being the vice consul to Italy for the state of Hawaii. Salmaggi agreed to an interview and soon found himself in front of the consul general in San Francisco.

"I walked into this board room, and I saw all these little baldheaded Italians and said, "Oh boy, this is going to be trouble," he recalls, letting out dresses up three nights a week a long chuckle. "Well, I spoke in Capone-era cutfits, com-

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randatory retirement

70, and a new vice consul will

be installed in Hawaii this

summer. Salmaggi says he is

very saddened by having to

served both countries so well

In the meantime, Salmaggi

is enjoying his 30th year living

in Honolulu. He remarried in

1979, several years after his

beloved wife of 30 years,

Nancy, passed away. He and

his present wife, Maria, now

share a 12th-floor condomin-

ium just a few doors from the

Outrigger Canoe Club near

Diamond Head, and Linda,

his only daughter (from his

first marriage), lives in Kaha-

"My wife, Maria, is a very

attractive woman. She was

born in New York but raised

in Italy, and we have a beau-

tiful life together here," Sal-

maggi boasts, obviously very

much in love. The two of them

also own a home in Sarasota,

Fla., where they spend several

In between baseball games,

he keeps busy with a number

of projects, not the least of

which is his part-time job as

mobster-theme restaurant and

disco at the Hyatt Regency

where he has worked for more

than 10 years, Salmaggi

"The Boss" at Spats, the

months a year.

and for so long.

Guido Salmaggi

During his career as a singer, Salmaggi sang in opera companies that toured nationally on television, radio probably and Broadway. He did The Ed Sullivan Show years ago, and position he has sung duets numerous times with his close friend Beverly Sills, who grew up with him in Brooklyn. He also keeps in touch with old friends boint, the like Placido Domingo, Luciation at no Pavarotti, Robert Merrill, ie turned Alan King and Carl Reiner, to

> But memories of singing are not good enough for Salmaggi. He still sings Gounod's Ave Maria at weddings and special Masses, and the one thing that continues to put the pizazz in his life today is singing The Star-Spangled Banner. Beheve it or not, he says he has never accepted a nickel for singing the song because he considers it a privilege

"He is so patriotic that singing the national anthem is like leave his Italian post, but he medicine to him," says Maria, is extremely proud to have who supports his singing at ball games and often travels with him. "It's invigorating to him and seems to keep him fit. It's an important part of his

> Salmaggi says The Star-Spangled Banner is extremely difficult to perform, and like many other singing artists in the country, he agrees the national anthem should be changed to America the Beautiful, a less violent and much easier song to sing. But his reverence for the current amthem remains unshakeable, and he strongly prefers that those who sing it for the public do so in a traditional style.

> "I'm a traditional guy, and I don't like to hear a rock 'm' roller or someone else do it in their style because it wasna't written that way. A lot of people just don't do justice to t. It's like putting a moustache on Mona Lisa.

> As difficult as the song may be, Salmaggi says he's never forgotten the words in all the times he's sung it, and he stopped counting after 4,000 performances. He has made a deal with Maria that on the day he does forget the words, he'll hang it up. Until then, his love affair with the song con-



6 at night, I'm going to sing The Star-Spangled Banner at the Great Hall of the Hyatt Regency Hotel near the water-

Whew! That's a lot of "Oh, say, can you sees?" and "by the dawn's early lights" for just one day. But Salmaggi wouldn't miss a minute of it. As he sits down at lunch to discuss his star-spangled life over a tender baked mahimahi at the canoe club's dining room, you get the feeling he'd sing the song 10 more times on the Fourth of July if he had enough time and someone would just ask.

It's not that he's one of those loud, boisterous guys who would grab a microphone anywhere he could find one just to relive the past or show off how well he's maintained his vocal chords. Salmaggi is actually quite softspoken, preferring instead to behave as a gentleman who has lived a long life and enjoyed a long career in the arts.

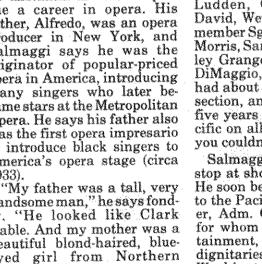
But the elder opera star does admit to having a little prosciutto (ham) in him, and he national anthem at baseball he's one of those guys who dearly loves his country and everything the song repre-

"I started singing The Star-Spangled Banner in 1937 at handsome man," he says fond-Ebbets Field in Brooklyn for ly. "He looked like Clark the Brooklyn Dodgers, and Gable. And my mother was a I've been singing it ever beautiful blond-haired, bluesince," he says proudly, put- eyed girl from Northern ting his fork down and ignor- Italy."

people who have led a story-book life like Salmaggi's. As one of nine children born to Italian immigrants, he was aised on the streets of Droot lyn, where he grew up playing 'punchball" with the likes of Danny Kaye, Alan King and Robert Merrill. Even today, despite his former training in voice, many of his words are punctuated with the accent from his neighborhood.

"Our part of Brooklyn was Jewish, Irish and Italian," he remembers, returning to his fish and talking between mouthfuls. "We used to fight each other and call each other the worst names, but if any one of us got in trouble in those days, one would help the other immediately. It was a beautiful way of life then — not like today, where everybody hates each other and all that violence and drugs and stuff."

s a teen-ager, Salmaggi took voice and studied ▲ Altalian in order to pursue a career in opera. His father, Alfredo, was an opera producer in New York, and Salmaggi says he was the still loves to sing at special originator of popular-priced occasions. He comes off as a opera in America, introducing man who has been singing the many singers who later became stars at the Metropolitan games for 40 years because Opera. He says his father also was the first opera impresario to introduce black singers to America's opera stage (circa





Planting a Kiss on Maria



During a WWII USO show

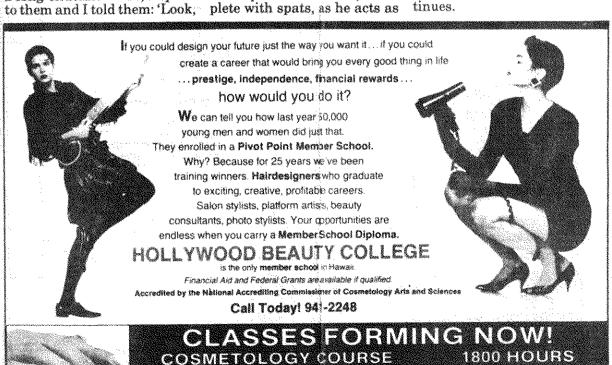
and we went all over the island auditioning people.

'We found guys like Alan Ludden, Carl Reiner, Hal David, Werner Klemperer (remember Sgt. Shultz?), Howard Morris, Sam Wanamaker. Farley Granger, Ernie Flatt, Joe DiMaggio, Dickie Moore. We had about 15 or 20 guys in the section, and we did shows for five years throughout the Pacific on all these little islands you couldn't even land on."

Salmaggi's contacts didn't stop at show business, either. He soon became a good friend to the Pacific Fleet commander, Adm. Chester W. Nimitz. for whom he arranged entertainment, and sang tenor for dignitaries who came in from Washington. "I was known as Adm. Nimitz's favorite tenor. and after the shows, he would bring me in the kitchen where I would cook spaghetti. We would eat in the kitchen around midnight after every-

one had left.' It was a relationship that would inadvertently solidify another relationship for Salmaggi. On a United Service Organization tour to the Mainland, arranged for him by Nimitz so he could go to New York to see his mother, he rendezvoused with a girlfriend in Hollywood, named Nancy Stair. He married her a day later, enjoyed a one-day honeymoon and then returned to Hawaii. It was February 1944, and the war ended later that year.

After his discharge from the



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