



# Life and Work of Pauline Viardot Garcia: The Years of Fame 1836-1863

*Barbara Kendall-davies*

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The name of Pauline Viardot Garcia was well known during her lifetime, but after her death in 1910, she passed into obscurity. She was born in Paris in 1821, the youngest child of the Spanish tenor, Manuel Garcia; her sister was Maria Malibran, and her brother, Manuel Patrizio, was an eminent teacher of singing. The first volume of her biography ranges from 1836 until 1863 and covers the most important years of her operatic career. Several composers wrote for her, including Meyerbeer, for whom she created Fides in *Le Prophete*; Saint Saens modelled the role of Delilah on her and Brahms composed the Alto Rhapsody, which she premiered in 1870. She encouraged Gounod to write his first opera, *Sapho*, and sang the title role in the premiere at the Paris Opera and at Covent Garden. Schumann dedicated his *Liederkreis Op. 24* to Viardot, and Faure dedicated several of his songs to her. She launched the career of Jules Massenet, and gave valuable assistance to Sullivan, Bizet, Stanford, Arthur Goring Thomas and several other musicians at the beginning of their careers. Although she was not good looking, she had a fascinating personality and great charm and several men fell in love with her, including Alfred de Musset, Gounod, Maurice Sand, Ary Scheffer, Berlioz, and Ivan Turgenev, who loved her devotedly for forty years, although she was married to Louis Viardot for the whole of that time. She was a linguist, artist, composer and talented pianist who studied with Franz Liszt, as well as being a superb singer and actress. Liszt admired her songs and said that she was the first woman composer of genius. Her talent for friendship was great, and she counted Chopin and George Sand as two of her most intimate friends. From 1863 until 1870, she lived in Baden-Baden where she became a celebrated musical hostess, as well as a fine teacher and composer. This book traces the life and work of one of the most important sopranos of the nineteenth century, Pauline Viardot Garcia. Her influence on figures like Meyerbeer, Turgenev and Liszt alone makes this volume, the first comprehensive biography ever published in English, indispensable to the musicologist with an interest in the nineteenth century.

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