

SUBSCRIBER? LOG IN

USERNAME

PASSWORD

LOG IN

[Forgot Your Password?](#)

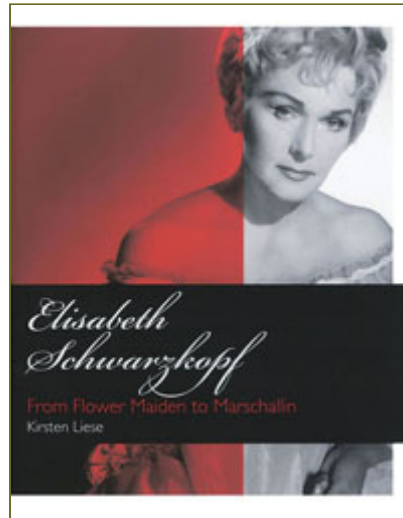
Current Subscriber or Guild Member? Log in above to get free articles and features available only to OPERA NEWS readers.

Need help logging in?
[Click here](#)

DEPARTMENT

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf: From Flower Maiden to Marschallin

□ *By Kirsten Liese, Photography by Lillian Fayer*
Amadeus Press, 169 pp.
\$27.95



Offstage, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf wore minimal makeup and did little to make herself glamorous. Onstage, she was gorgeous. Well into her sixties, greeting guests after a recital, she could have passed for thirty-five, even at close range. That was part of Schwarzkopf's magic, and it is the magic that emerges from this pictorial biography, authored by Berlin-based journalist Kirsten Liese, with the core of its photos by the singer's close friend and contemporary Lillian Fayer.

This is an authorized book. Schwarzkopf collaborated closely with its creators up to the time of her death, choosing — or approving — the images. There are none of the unflattering shots that appeared in some German magazines in her last years, nor any reference in the texts to her putative Nazi affiliations. A colorful essay by Charles Scribner III is an expanded version of an article printed in *OPERA NEWS* in 2006.

Just as Schwarzkopf's singing was a thing of studied, carefully planned perfection, so are the book's photographs and texts.

Fayer lauds the singer's "sincerity, her friendliness, her self-criticism, and the fact that she never put on airs," but her star portraits are more of an idealized being than a living, human being. In life, the singer was not so open or transparent a person as the authors would have us believe.

The photographs are no less gorgeous or unforgettable for that, however. Some bear a resemblance to Marlene Dietrich, but Fayer points out that the actress had her molars removed to emphasize her cheekbones, while "Elisabeth was so beautiful and photogenic that no tricks were needed." The only flaw in her face was a small gap between the upper front teeth — a feature she seldom disguised and later managed to turn into a virtue. Fayer's photos of Schwarzkopf in costume convey the essence of the operatic character rather than the real-life singer, though it is significant that the five signature characters of her later years — Mozart's Countess, Donna Elvira and Fiordiligi; Strauss's Marschallin and *Capriccio* Countess — are all elegant, aristocratic women.

The rarer candid shots are especially charming — cheesecake photos from circa 1950, a moment with her Siamese cats, telling moments from her master classes. Yet Schwarzkopf's obsession with perfection, her separation of public from private persona, were an integral part of her artistry. This exquisite volume may offer an incomplete picture of the total human being, but it comes very close to conveying the essence of her artistic credo. □

ROBERT CROAN

Send feedback to [OPERA NEWS](#).

Copyright © OPERA NEWS 2009

[Contact Opera News](#)