

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1065

THE HAROLD WAYNE COLLECTION - Volume 1

Dr. Harold Wayne started collecting vocal records In the 1960s. It was a time at which many collectors considered that, with the demand for rare specimens rising, it was already too late to assemble a representative and substantial collection of the moderately uncommon, let alone what Hurst has termed the pinnacles of the collector's ambition.

The Wayne collection is the result of an enthusiasm which developed into determination and - as he himself would admit - ultimately into an obsession with records. By correspondence and by telephone, personally and by proxy, by means systematic or serendipitous, but always relentlessly, he scoured Europe, the Americas, and the Antipodes. The result is a collection which, for its scope, its completeness, its state of preservation, and for the importance of some of the singers of whom it holds specimens which are thought to be unique, is probably unparalleled.

Symposium Records is proud to present this compact disc which features singers who, though not exclusively Italian by birth, are nevertheless of the Italian school. Every item on it is a major rarity. It is the first of a series which will reissue - many of them for the first time - a selection of important records from the Wayne Collection.

Dr. Wayne writes: I am delighted to have the opportunity afforded by SYMPOSIUM RECORDS of re-recording on to compact disc the rarest records of some of the most interesting singers who were before the public from the 1850s onwards. Perhaps, in this way, a number of important items preserved on old shellac records may continue to be heard by collectors of the present and future. It may be of interest to add some notes on my own experiences of the relative scarcity of some of the records included in this reissue. Of the Fabbri records I have seen only two copies of the *Il Profeta* title. The *Vaccai Romeo e Giulietta* is also extremely rare. A fourth Gravina title, of an aria from *Gli Ugonotti*, may exist. Among the de Negri titles, 'Der Asra' was until recently believed to be limited to a single copy, but a second has now come to light. The *I Medici* title is the rarest Kaschmann, although, at one time or another, I have actually found five copies of it, the *Otello* would be the next most difficult to find. I am indebted to my friend and fellow collector Dr. Michael Henstock, without whose enthusiasm, knowledge, and continual encouragement this project would never have materialised.

GIOVANNI GRAVINA (1872-1912) The rarity of the three recorded titles of the bass Giovanni Gravina is matched by the scarcity of information regarding his career. Scott (*The Record of Singing I*, 1977) states that he was a Sicilian who, after studies in Milan, appeared in Naples, Palermo, and Rome before singing at La Scala, Milan in 1902. In the same year he sang with Pinto, Caruso, and Sammarco in the world première of Franchetti's *Germania*. Later he made many appearances in Russia and South America. in *Aida*, *La Gioconda*, *La Bohème*, and *Rigoletto*. He died In Boston In 1912. The *Simone Boccanegra* recording was still unknown when, in 1947, Bauer's *Historical Records* listed two titles for Gravina. The records deliver a sonorous voice of impressive power and beauty, and bear splendid testimony to the skills of the early recording engineers. The glimpse that they afford of a young and still developing artist prompts us to speculate on what we might have enjoyed had he recorded in his maturity.

GUERRINA FABBRI (1866-1946) The powerful tones of Guerrina Fabbri earned for her the sobriquet of 'The Tamagno of Contraltos' in the final decades of the 19th century when, after her début in 1885, she established herself as an artist of the first rank. Often in the company of her sister, the mezzo-soprano Vittorina, she sang alongside the greatest singers of her time in Buenos Aires, Chicago, London, Madrid, Milan, Montevideo, New York, and Santiago, as well as the operatic centres of Russia. She was particularly noted in *Semiramide*, *La Cenerentola*, and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, the latter in the original keys. Her repertory also included *Carmen*, *Lohengrin*, *L'Italiana in Algieri*, *Il Profeta*, *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi*, *Falstaff* (Mistress Quickly), Gluck's *Orfeo*, and Massenet's *Cendrillon*. For their historical associations, their artistic value, and their rarity the records of this coloratura contralto are among the most sought-after prizes for collectors. They are arresting documents as they display the power, the almost luscious quality and astonishing flexibility of what was evidently a very large voice, and the indefinable authority which characterises a great singer of the old school. Her delivery has a grand, assertive character. Especially notable are her skill in florid music, such as that of Arsace in *Semiramide*, and the ease with which, with well-equalised registers and a scarcely noticeable break, she reaches her lowest notes. Against these remarkable qualities her faults - her occasionally imprecise intonation, for example in the concluding section of the Vaccai piece, and some lack of refinement - are but slight flaws.

GIOVANNI BATTISTA DE NEGRI (1851-1924) One of the earliest singers to record, De Negri was, after Tamagno, the most prominent Italian dramatic tenor of his day. After his début in 1878 he at first sang roles such as Faust, Pollione (*Norma*), Lohengrin, Alfredo, and Riccardo (*Un Ballo in Maschera*). When, however, in the late 1880s he took up the part of Otello, the power of his middle range enabled him to rival Tamagno himself, and even surpass him in passages such as those of the final scene of the opera. His histrionic powers as Otello are said to have made him the envy of actors of the stature of Giovanni Emanuel, the legitimate heir to Salvini and Rossi. In 1895 De Negri created the title role in the

world première of Mascagni's *Guglielmo Ratcliff* (based on Heine's tragedy). In characteristic Mascagnian fashion the part lingers in the upper regions of the stave, with at one point 19 consecutive F naturals, and though it had daunted even Francesco Marconi it did not intimidate De Negri. His performance of a part which was '... so long, heavy and difficult through the predominance of high notes' was generally held to have been superb. 'He did not simply deliver the notes in a virile and resonant voice, but he was an experienced and shrewd interpreter in depicting the character.' And, indeed, the difficulty of staging *Ratcliff* since De Negri's day is in good measure that of casting the part of the protagonist. De Negri's life on the stage was cut short by a surgical operation which, in 1896, robbed him of much of his superb voice; he last appeared in opera in Trieste in 1898. His four records were made in Milan some four years later when, despite diminished vocal means, he preserved two fragments of his *Otello*. The passage from *Norma* is an echo of his early career. 'Der Asra' is the rarest of this extremely scarce series.

GIUSEPPE KASCHMANN (1850-1925) Giuseppe Kaschmann was born on July 14th 1850 (some references give 1852) on the island of Lussinpiccolo, in what was then part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. At the outbreak of the war between Bosnia and Herzegovina he deserted from the Austrian army and took himself to Milan where he studied with Alberta Giovannini. After his début at Turin in February 1876, as Alfonso in *La Favorita*, Kaschmann's career carried him to Venice for *La Forza del Destino* and Rossini's *Mose*. Almost immediately he became one of the most sought-after baritones for the principal theatres of Italy. A mere two years after his début he made his first appearance at La Scala, where he followed Lassalle in *Don Carlos* and *Il Re di Lahore*. Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Cairo, Lisbon, Madrid, Montevideo, Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Warsaw knew him well. He sang Parsifal and Tannhäuser at Bayreuth, with considerable success. His two seasons at the Metropolitan were, however, not wholly successful; like Stagno's, his vibrato was not appreciated. But Kaschmann's career was long and distinguished. In 1907 his singing so impressed Pope Pio X that the pontiff interceded with the Austrian authorities to permit the baritone to visit his native city, from which he had been exiled since his military desertion so many years before. In 1915 he declined the Chair of Singing offered him at the Conservatory of San Pietro a Maiella, of Naples, and continued to appear in opera. When *Aida*, *Don Carlos*, *Macbeth*, and *Guglielmo Tell* dropped from his repertoire he turned to buffo parts such as Doctor Bartolo, which he sang at the San Carlo of Naples at least as late as 1916, and *Don Pasquale*, in which he made his final operatic appearances at the Teatro Quirino, of Rome, in 1922, when he was 72. If we discount some later, unpublished, Edison recordings, Kaschmann's five G&T titles of 1903, made when he had already been singing in public for almost thirty years, are his sole legacy to posterity. They show the decorated style of another age; the ornaments do not disrupt the vocal line but his observance of tempo leaves something to be desired. The 'Brindisi' from Thomas's *Amleto*, in whose title role he attained some of his greatest successes, is notable for a cadenza executed with a

fluency and brilliance worthy of a much younger man. However, it is in 'O dei verd'anni miei' that Kaschmann, while not effacing memories of Battistini's splendid record, illustrates why the grand manner is so termed. His majestic delivery of the phrase 'Ah! se vincitor de'secoli' perfectly suggests the figure of Don Carlos, King of Castille, as, within the sepulchre of Charlemagne, he broods on his lost youth.

FANNY TORESELLA (1856-1914) The lyric soprano Fanny (sometimes spelled 'Fany') Elena Costantina Toresella was born in Tiflis, where her father, Antonio, was conductor and impresario at the local opera house. She was named after her godmother, the singer Fanny Scheggi. Toresella studied with her father, and was his pride and joy, to such an extent that he appears in *Mia fia*, the comedy by Giacinto Gallina where, in his Venetian dialect, he ceaselessly exalts his daughter: 'Mia fia [figlia], mia fia e mia fia ...'. Toresella made her début in 1876 as Fenena in *Nabucco* at the Teatro Comunale of Trieste, where her father had been chorus-master since 1867. Subsequently, the same theatre saw her as Siebel, and as the shepherd in the first performance in Trieste of *Tannhäuser*. Her progress was rapid: all the principal theatres of Italy and other European lands, North and South America heard her in works as disparate as *Amleto*, *Un Ballo in Masehera* (Oscar), *Don Pasquale*, *L'Ebreja* (Eudoxie), *Gli Ugonotti* (Queen), *Il Profeta* (Berta), *I Pescatori di Perle*, *Rigoletto*, *Ernani*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *I Puritani*, *Carmen* (Micaëla), *L'Amico Fritz*, *Cendrillon*, Puccini's *La Bohème* (Musetta), and rarities such as Mascagni's *I Rantzau*. She formed part of the famous touring companies with which the publisher Edoardo Sonzogno introduced the works of the 'New Italian School' to foreign audiences. On January 17th 1901 she sang at the Teatri Regio, Turin, in one of the six simultaneous premières of Mascagni's *Le Maschere*. From 1906 until her death in 1914 she held the chair of singing at the R. Accademia di Santa Cecilia, Rome. Toresella's records were made in Milan in 1900 and are some of the earliest of Italian celebrity titles. To the two titles listed by Bauer the present reissue adds the romanza 'Prendi, per me sei libero'; according to Schmidt this is not (as stated on the record label) by [Carlo Augusto de] Bériot but by his wife, Maria Malibran, who customarily introduced it into her performances of *L'Elisir d'Amore*. Technically the records are somewhat primitive and we need the ear of faith; in particular, the turntable speeds appear to vary. Thus, what we hear does not immediately reflect the voice and abilities as they must have appeared to the critics who generally thought so well of her, in Latin countries at any rate, during a career of some thirty years in the company of some of the most distinguished singers of the day.

LEOPOLDO SIGNORETTI (1852?-1915) The standard reference books yield sparse biographical information on the tenor Leopoldo Signoretto. What emerges shows Signoretto to have been a tenor - Stagno and Masini were others - who, without apparent effort, sang parts as diverse as *Almaviva* and

Lohengrin. He appeared in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and in Filippo Sangiorgi's *Diana di Cheverny*, at the Teatro Paganini, Genoa, in 1876. In 1877 the same city saw him in *I Lombardi*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Favorita*, and Emilio Bozzano's *Benvenuto Cellini*, all at the Teatro Politeama Genovese. São Paulo, Brazil, heard him in *Poliuto* and *Il Barbiere* in 1876, and Barcelona in 1878-9. He appeared at the San Carlo, Naples in 1883/4, in *La Gioconda*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and *La Traviata*, and in the Spring of 1884 at the Théâtre Italien of Paris. At the Teatro Comunale, Bologna, he sang in Tannhäuser and also in the world première (October 2nd 1884) of *Isora di Provenza* by Luigi Mancinelli, then chief conductor at that theatre. Signoretti was a mainstay of the season at Madrid, 1884-5, when he sang 42 of the 123 performances at the Teatro Real, including *L'Africana*, and he returned there in 1887/8 in *Ebrea (La Juive)*, *La Gioconda* and *Saffo*. At the Teatro Costanzi, Rome, in 1886 his roles were Edgardo, Almaviva, and Eleazar; In this last he replaced Escalaïs in a run of performances at La Scala, Milan, in 1888. His Wagnerian roles also included Erik in *Il Vascello Fantasma (Der Fliegende Holländer)* and *Lohengrin*. Signoretti's pupils included the baritone Nicolai Shevelev. This reissue ends with three of Signoretti's five Zonofono records, made in Milan in 1901. Of almost legendary rarity they are among the most elusive of collectors' specimens. For their period they are astonishingly forward recordings. Indeed, one wonders whether their very realism led to their early deletion when the destructive effects of steel needles on their louder passages became apparent. Moreover, like Toresella's records, they appear to suffer from speed fluctuations, especially at the end of 'Una vergine'.

Michael E. Henstock

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