

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1125

. . . or if by reason of strength four score years.

LUCIEN FUGÈRE was born in a poor district of Paris on 22 July 1848, the family's eighth and penultimate child. The father was a zinc-engraver and, most unusually for the social milieu and times, excellently informed in contemporary affairs and literature. The mother ran a tobacco kiosk, but when the father died (Lucien was then six years of age), the children had to start work each as soon as possible. Thus at twelve he became an apprentice to a monumental mason. He continued his education, perhaps following the example of his father, by attending evening classes. He was already enamoured of the stage and hung around the theatres trying to see any performances he could; often the latter part of a show by begging a ticket of someone leaving early. Of course if one could get into a claque then an entire performance could be heard plus a small fee for one's trouble. In addition street singers and cabaret performers could be heard for nothing or next to nothing. Fugère's first public appearances must have been at such cabarets, perhaps paying for his drink by performing a song as once Schubert had paid for his by writing one. He persevered undaunted when the Conservatoire turned him down for insufficient musical knowledge and when a singer who agreed to hear him would give him no recommendation. For some time he attended the Conservatoire's twice weekly free evening classes. Presumably he could not be refused entry to these or perhaps it was a year when enrolment was low, and thus under Ragunneau and Batiste he gained a grounding in vocal technique. After a while he realised that private tuition was necessary so he deserted the chisel for the briefcase of a travelling salesman. This position did not last so, with nothing to lose and with the aid of a good friend, he applied for and obtained work at the Ba-Ta-Clan Theatre. He must by now have acquired skills in voice management for he survived heavy schedules in the city's largest auditorium. He must have gained here great experience too, for this establishment offered virtually everything from opera to vaudeville. He remained there two years, his success reflected by steady increases in pay.

At the beginning of 1874 he transferred to the Bouffes Parisiens with a contract lasting until 1877.

His satisfaction at entering into a regular contract of three years' duration may have been somewhat lessened when the Opéra Comique tried to draw him away. But in the Autumn of 1877 he was able to join the Opéra-Comique, evidently to his and its satisfaction, for he remained there until 1911.

His career, like those of many of his colleagues, was largely on his native soil, but he did appear at Covent Garden during the Jubilee Season of 1897.

Throughout the Great War he appeared exclusively for the entertainment of the armed forces. When hostilities ended he was offered a contract at the Opéra, he was then seventy-one, but he determined to remain with the Comique.

From now on he performed less. The half-century of his début at the Opéra Comique was marked by a performance of *The Barber of Seville* and his four score years at Le Touquet's Casino with *La Basoche*. He then started recording for the French Columbia Company. He occasionally appeared at the Opéra Comique even up to 1932.

On 15th January 1935 he died in the city of his birth, one of her most celebrated and adored singers.

Fugère began to record for Columbia at the age of 80 after an exceptionally long and heavy career. In Fugère's case posterity is fortunate in that by this time the electric recording process was well established and, particularly for the lower voices with piano or light orchestral accompaniment, capable of astonishing vividness and fidelity.

The state of the voice is not merely beyond expectation, it is amazing. The timbre is in much of the range of great beauty, the intonation is excellent, the breath control remarkable and the enunciation crystal clear. In addition, no coloratura passage, no decoration has to be avoided though the trill sounds a little flimsy; maybe it was always thus. Naturally to be working at eighty is itself unusual, but to be singing as Fugère does at this age testifies not only to the generosity of the gods, but also to the very soundest of trainings and to life-long care and prudence.

The repertoire also is remarkable, many of the pieces being rarely if ever otherwise recorded and the works of Chabrier, Messager and Charpentier are "Creator" recordings. The only excursions beyond the frontiers of the French world are to Mozart and Flotow. As with everything about Fugère, there is here, too, charm and sincerity, commitment and grace. Papageno and Leporello are engaging fellows, but of course they sing in a style current in France long before the turn of the century. If this is not to our taste today it is for that reason the more interesting. Otherwise by its very nature this recording is in the currently sacrosanct category of Authentic Performance.

Acknowledgements: Symposium Records is most grateful to Mr. Fred Westwood for making these records from his collection available for everyone to enjoy and for information and help with the production to Ruth Edge, EMI Records Ltd., and to Paul Lewis and Adrian Tuddenham.

This issue includes all Fugère's known recordings of operatic music for Columbia and as many of the songs as could be fitted within the remaining time.

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Fugère's repertoire was enormous. In the following précis "W" indicates a world and "P" a Paris première.

1871	Henrion		O gue la Marjolaine
	Wach		Vendanges
	sketches	E.g.	La femme qui trompe son mari
			L'homme n'est pas parfait
1874	Hubans	W	Le tour de Moulinet
	Offenbach	W	Mme. l'Archiduc
	Serpette	W	La branche cassee
1875	Douai	W	Les mules de Suzette
	Offenbach	W	La creole
1876	Offenbach	W	La boîte au lait
	Serpette	W	Le moulin de Vert-Galant
1877	Vasseur	W	La sorrentine
	Massé		Les noces de Jeannette
Other works first sung at this time and during his first years at the Opéra Comique:			
	Adam		Le postillon de Longumeau
	Auber		Les diamants de la couronne
	Audran		La poupée de Nuremberg
	Delahaye	W	Pepita
	Dubois	W	Le pain bis
	Gounod		Cinq-Mars
			Roméo et Juliette
	Hérold		Le pré aux Clercs
	Maillart		Les dragons de Villars
	Marechal	W	La taverne des Trabans
	Mozart		La flute enchantée
	Offenbach		La jolie parfumeuse
	Paër		Le maître de chapelle
	Poise		L'amour médecin
1884	Poise	W	Joli Gilles
1887	Chabrier	W	Le roi malgré lui
1890	Messager	W	La Basoche
1893	Saint-Saëns	W	Phryné
1894	Massenet	W	Le portrait de Manon
1895	Godard	W	La Vivandière
1898	Puccini	P	La Bohème
1899	Massenet	W	Le Cendrillon
1900	Charpentier	W	Louise
1901	Massenet	W	Grisélidis
1903	Missa	W	La Muguette
1904	Massenet	W	Le jongleur de Notre-Dame
1905	Massenet	P	Cherubin
1907	Messager	W	Fortunio
1910	Massenet	P	Don Quichotte
1913	Février	W	La Carmosine