

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1138

The Harold Wayne Collection – Volume 16 Giovanni Zenatello – Volume 1

GIOVANNI ZENATELLO was born in Verona on the 22nd February, 1876, the third son of a local baker. He showed unusual interest in music from an early age. He sang in a number of churches as a treble, but was always overshadowed by his older brother Giuseppe, who had a very beautiful voice. Giuseppe however, developed chronic laryngitis through early misuse of his voice and it was only after this that Giovanni's great talents were discovered. He was very distressed at his brother's vocal problems and when his own voice broke took great care not to suffer a similar fate. He eventually received private lessons from Maestro Zaneni who was greatly impressed by Giovanni's voice and musical ability, but who trained him as a baritone.

In 1898 he made his début in the Teatro Mercadante in Milan as Silvio in *I Pagliacci* without making any great impression and for the next two years he was confined to small comprimario roles. He later joined the company of the Teatro Bellini in Naples but was again given no opportunity to show his real talent. He himself felt that his voice was essentially that of a tenor and eventually a chance arose for him to prove his true worth. The company was billed to perform *I Pagliacci*. The tenor who was to sing Canio withdrew at the last moment. The impresario Don Gennaro was distraught, but nevertheless rejected out of hand Zenatello's offer to sing the role. Finally in sheer desperation he allowed the young man to take over the part. The rest is operatic history. After 'Vesti la giubba' the enthusiasm of the audience was boundless and the young tenor soon made a name for himself.

He sang with the company for the rest of the season but was soon offered other engagements. The news of his success reached Milan and the agent Delilie found him plenty of work on all sides. When he was singing in the Teatro Communale in Brescia Arturo Toscanini came to hear him and was immediately impressed. He brought Zenatello to Milan for an audition and at the conclusion hurried onto the stage and embraced the tenor who henceforth became a pupil of the great maestro.

It was by no means all plain sailing however. After a general rehearsal at La Scala, Toscanini, in front of a large audience, was so cruelly critical that he reduced Zenatello to tears. However the young singer responded to every criticism of the great conductor by renewing his efforts to perfect his art and he finally achieved a great triumph at his début at La Scala in the title role of Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust* in 1903. At this time he made his first gramophone records for The Gramophone & Typewriter Company.

Within the next four years he created the leading tenor roles in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, Giordano's *Siberia*, Franchetti's *La Figlia di Jorio* and Cilea's *Gloria* and he was generally acknowledged as one of the greatest tenors of the day.

His great success at La Scala soon brought him international fame. He made a very promising début at Covent Garden in *Un Ballo in Maschera* on the 6th October 1905 and followed this with appearances in *Manon Lescaut*, *Aida* and finally *Madama Butterfly*.

A leading critic described Zenatello's Pinkerton as "Much more distinctive than Caruso's", which was praise indeed. He returned to Covent Garden for several seasons and in 1908 sang the title role in Verdi's *Otello* to tremendous critical acclaim, being hailed as the legitimate successor of Tamagno who created the role.

In America he sang with the Manhattan Opera Company from 1907 onwards and was one of the Company's outstanding principals alongside Melba, Tetrazzini, Renaud and Sammarco. He was well received in many roles, but his greatest triumph was in *Otello* with Melba as Desdemona and Sammarco as Iago on Christmas night in 1908. Due to his engagement at the Manhattan Opera House he never sang at the Metropolitan Opera although he did sing in six performances when the company was on tour and Caruso was ill.

For the next few years his career was mainly in North and South America. He was a member of the Boston Opera Company, and sang in Mexico and Havana before returning to Europe in 1913. He settled in Verona and was responsible for initiating the series of performances in the arena in that city, where he and his second wife, Maria Gay often sang together; especially in *Carmen*.

Finally, in 1926 he returned to Covent Garden for some performances of *Otello*, but shortly after this ill health compelled him to retire and he concentrated on teaching in New York, where he died in 1949.

Zenatello's voice was essentially a powerful lirico-spinto of fine quality and great range and volume. It was remarkably even throughout its entire compass with beautifully projected gleaming high notes and his diction was always exemplary. He was able to sing the taxing role of *Otello* superbly, but he could also undertake purely lyrical parts, where his control of his mezza voce was particularly effective.

ARMIDA PARSI-PETTINELLA was born in 1872 and made her début as Azucena at the Costanzi theatre in Rome in 1893. She first sang at La Scala, Milan in 1895 and was immediately recognised as one of the finest mezzo-sopranos of her day. Her career was mainly in Italy and she recorded extensively for Fonotipia.

PASQUALE AMATO was born in Naples in 1878 and died there in 1942. He made his début in Naples in 1900 and was quickly accepted as one of the leading baritones of the time. He sang at Covent Garden in 1904 and first appeared at La Scala, Milan in 1907. He was engaged for the season of 1908 at the Metropolitan Opera, New York where he sang in almost every season until 1933.

ELISA BRUNO made her début in Turin in 1889. She was a pupil on Antonietta Fricci who was herself a pupil of Mathilde Marchesi and was a leading mezzo-soprano at La Scala during the first decade of this century. She sang with Caruso, Toresella and Giuseppe Pacini in *Rigoletto* at the Costanzi in Rome in the 1902-3

season. She was obviously an artist of importance, recording for The Gramophone & Typewriter Company in its Celebrity (red label) category, for Fonotipia and also for Pathé Frères.

ESTER MAZZOLENI (1883-1982) made her début at the Costanzi in Rome in 1906 and was a brilliant success at La Scala, Milan, when she first appeared there in 1908. For many years she was one of the great favourites of the Milanese audiences. Her voice displayed a vibrato which whilst rather excessive for Anglo-Saxon tastes was fully acceptable in the Latin countries. She always sang with great authority and dramatic conviction.

LINDA CANNETTI was born in Legnano in 1878 and died in 1960. She made her début as Marguérite in *Faust* in 1899 and sang at La Scala, Milan, where she was a great favourite, from 1909 to 1924. She sang at the Colon, Buenos Aires in 1914 and created the title role in Zandonai's *Francesca da Rimini* at the Regia in Turin on the 19th February 1914.

EUGENIA BURZIO was born in Turin in 1872 and died in Milan in 1922. She made her début at La Scala, Milan in 1906 and sang there until 1915. She was enormously popular in Italy where her fiery temperament and her vivid sense of drama soon made her a celebrity. She was essentially a singer of verismo operas and her voice as recorded sounds a little unsteady under pressure.

NINI FRASCANI was born in Milan in 1878 and made her début in Naples in 1899. Her career was mainly in Italy and South America where she sang at the Colon in Buenos Aires in 1915.

The music is presented chronologically by work and within each work by session, thus the piano accompanied versions are followed by those with orchestra. In the former the singer is very close to the apparatus, giving an extraordinarily vivid effect. In the latter he is further off, presumably to achieve a balance with the orchestra.

1 Il Trovatore - Ai nostri monti with Parsi-Pettinella

Manrico is thrown into prison with his foster mother, the half crazed gipsy Azucena, and she pleads with him to take her back to her native mountains. Zenatello sings with admirable restraint as he tries to comfort her and Parsi-Pettinella replies with great beauty of tone and a lovely legato line.

2 Il Trovatore - Tacea la notte with Amato

Amato's opening phrases are beautifully delivered and then he sounds very impressive as the jealous Di Luna listening to the Manrico of Zenatello who sings with easy grace and ringing tone in his serenade to Leonora.

3 Il Trovatore - Mal reggendo with Bruno

Manrico describes how he fought with Di Luna and had the latter at his mercy, but some instinct told him not to kill his rival. Azucena tells him to be less merciful in future! Both artists sing with fine dramatic style and their voices blend well.

Bruno's tone is less even than Parsi-Pettinella's and there is a marked change of quality when she uses her chest register.

4 Il Trovatore - Di quella pira

Manrico hears that Azucena has been captured and he fears that she will be burnt at the stake. He vows to rescue the old gipsy or die in the attempt. Zenatello follows the example of many tenors including Caruso in transposing the aria down a semi-tone, giving us a superb high B natural instead of the written high C.

5 Il Trovatore - Ah, quell'infame with Bruno and Mazzoleni

This follows after 'Ai nostri monti'. Azucena and Manrico are joined by Leonora who has offered herself to Di Luna in exchange for Manrico's release. He accuses her of faithlessness, not knowing that she has already poisoned herself. Zenatello sings with tremendous dramatic intensity in denouncing Leonora.

6 & 8 La Traviata - De' miei bollenti spiriti

Alfredo sings of his happiness living in the country with Violetta.

Zenatello lightens his tone and sounds a young and ardent lover, "living" as he remarks, "as if in heaven".

7 & 9 La Traviata - Questa donna conoscete?

Here Alfredo, thinking that Violetta has deliberately left him for a richer lover, denounces her mercilessly before an assembled company. Zenatello sums up all the power at his command in a splendid example of declamatory singing.

10 La Traviata - Parigi o cara with Cannetti

11 La Traviata – Gran' Dio, morir si giovane with Cannetti

In this touching duet the lovers are reunited and hope to leave Paris and return to the country, but Violetta soon realizes that she is too weak and that her death is inevitable. Both artists are at their lyrical best in the two excerpts, the second of which follows immediately from the first and begins 'Ah, non piu - a un tempio' - not the words on the label of the disc, these are heard later.

12 & 15 Un Ballo in Maschera - La rivedro nell'estasi

Richard, Earl of Warwick sees that Amelia, whom he loves, is on the list of guests at a coming reception. In this aria he is overjoyed at the thought of seeing her again. The role of Oscar is not included, although the chorus joins in. Zenatello expresses his delight, obviously relishing the splendid aria which Verdi wrote.

13 & 16 Un Ballo in Maschera - Di tu se fedele

Richard, disguised as a sailor, asks the prophetess, Ulrica, if his next voyage will be

a happy one. This light-hearted barcarolle display's Zenatello's voice at its lyrical best. In the earlier piano accompanied version the recording of the tenor's voice is amazing.

14 Un Ballo in Maschera - Non sai tu ... O! qual soave with Burzio

17 Un Ballo in Maschera - Non sai tu ... O! qual soave with Mazzoleni

The great love duet from Act 2 in which Richard eventually obtains an admission from Amelia that she loves him, is given almost without cuts on the two sides of a 27cm disc. Zenatello is at his most ardent and both Burzio in the piano accompanied version and Mazzoleni in the later orchestral one rise magnificently to the occasion.

18 La Forza del Destino - O tu che in seno

Alvaro has been wounded and believes he is dying. In this passionate prayer Zenatello sings supremely well with perfectly controlled phrasing and lovely tone. I consider it one of his finest recordings.

19 Aïda - Celesta Aïda

This love song is sung by Radames at the very beginning of the opera. Most tenors dread it because it occurs before they have had time to "warm up"; indeed Jean de Reszke frequently even omitted it. Zenatello seems a little hesitant at the beginning but the final phrase includes a top B flat sung almost piano, as Verdi indicates in the score, refraining from the much easier forte note usually substituted. Zenatello told Martinelli what happened when he was called upon to sing an audition in front of the composer. He decided to sing the piece as written, but to his great embarrassment at this very point his voice cracked. Verdi told him not to worry, he would have a fine career.

20 Aïda - Gia i sacerdoti ... Misero appien mi festi with Frascani

Amneris pleads with Radames to renounce Aïda and turn to her, in which case she will plead for his life. Radames spurns her advances throughout. The two excerpts continue for the whole scene apart from two insignificant cuts. Frascani sings beautifully as the love torn Amneris and Zenatello is equally convincing as the adamant Radames.

John Freestone

Dr. Wayne writes:

The seasoned collector would no doubt agree that the piano accompanied Fonotipias of Zenatello have always been more accessible than the orchestrally accompanied versions which replaced them. This is true also of a number of other singers on Fonotipia. One reason may be the astonishing vividness of the first series of Fonotipia's Milan recordings in comparison with almost any other, resulting in the retention of the 39000 group in the catalogue for a long time. But in any case the advent of the Great War which brought Fonotipia's Italian operation to a virtual halt, limited the catalogue life of the orchestral issues to a much shorter period than their predecessors.

62015, 62040, 69109 and 69110 are virtually unknown whilst the *Figlio di Jorio* titles, although creator records, are nearly as rare.

The 92000 series records turn up regularly until we reach 92751 *Germania* from which point on many are extremely difficult to acquire, particularly the *I Maestri Cantori* titles, the duets with Bruno and those numbered 92841 to 92866.

Of the 12" titles I have never seen 74031 and 74045, but copies do exist in one or two collections in Italy.

I discovered one unpublished record of Zenatello among a group of electric recordings of Gigli and Schipa, the remnants of an old collector's possessions to which I was referred, in a newly built block of flats in the heart of Milan. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw the xph number in the margin of the wax and the label in an unusual pale blue-grey inscribed "Zenatello" in black ink. It turned out to be a unique unpublished title, "La mia bandiera" by Rotoli.

Acknowledgement is made to Dr. Paul Lewis for help in preparing this issue. This compilation with its notes is copyright. It may not be broadcast, copied, hired out or publicly performed without permission.

Symposium Records

We believe that this series will come to be regarded by collectors, historians, and musicologists as the major means of access to a number of the most important of the earliest generation of recorded artists whose voices have survived only in recordings of surpassing rarity, and which are presented in this collection in the finest known specimens.