SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1168

The Harold Wayne Collection – Volume 19

Giovanni Zenatello – Volume 4

Zenatello as Teacher and Talent Scout

The appearances of Zenatello at Covent Garden in 1926 marked the beginnings of the twilight of his career. Details of his final appearances in Italy and America are given later in this booklet thanks to information supplied by Tom Kaufman.

In 1927, 1928 and 1929 the tenor's direction of the Summer Festivals in Verona gave him great artistic satisfaction, but at the same time they caused him heavy financial losses as he was personally responsible for the overall expenditure involved. The subsidies which were later given by the city and the state had not yet been made available. The three seasons were also dogged by uncertain weather and a number of performances had to be cancelled. As a result Zenatello was forced to sell some of his properties in Spain, and compelled to leave his beloved Verona and return to America to pursue other activities related to his musical career. His great friend Gatti-Casazza, the artistic director of the New York Metropolitan Opera, asked him to help him to engage new artists of outstanding talent to appear at the Metropolitan Opera.

His first action in reply to this request was to open a school of singing in New York and the response from aspiring artists was so great that he had to choose only those who showed outstanding promise.

When the great soprano Galli-Curci retired from the Metropolitan Opera in 1930 and Gatti-Casazza was trying to find someone to replace her, he asked Zenatello, who was sailing for Europe in the Spring in search of new voices, to help him. Zenatello visited an old friend and singing teacher in Paris, Maestro de Gorostiago, and heard a number of his pupils, but without being greatly impressed by any of them. However, a few days later, when he paid another visit to his friend, a charming petite person arrived to visit her old teacher. He persuaded her to sing some arias from her repertoire. By the end of the first aria Zenatello had already realized that he had found a brilliant young star to offer to the 'Met'. He invited the young soprano to spend the summer at his villa Di Quinto where another friend, the pianist Adone Zecchi, was also staying. Together they coached her in the principal roles of several works suited to the coloratura repertoire.

In the autumn Zenatello presented the young artiste to Gatti-Casazza who quickly signed her up, happy to find a worthy successor to Galli-Curci. Thus, thanks to Zenatello, Lily Pons made her sensational debut as Lucia at the Metropolitan Opera.

He had many successful pupils who sang on the radio and television. Among them was the tenor Nino Martini who was for some years a favourite at the 'Met'

and also appeared in a number of films. He was a native of Verona, like Zenatello, and a close friendship, which continued until Zenatello's death, developed between them.

Other artists whom he taught or coached included Licia Albanese, Stella Roman, Bruna Castagna, Hilde Reggiani and Bruno Landi, all of whom had great success in America.

After the Second World War he returned from time to time to his native Verona and was persuaded to accept the direction of the Summer Festival in 1947. He returned to New York, where he was impressed by a young unknown artist who had been a pupil of Elvira di Hidalgo. She was having considerable success in Trieste but could not obtain work in New York. Although she was inexperienced, he engaged her to sing the role of La Gioconda in the Summer festival in Verona. This was the beginning of Maria Callas's great international career and a fitting climax to the artistic life of Zenatello.

He died in New York on the 10th February 1949 and his body was taken to Verona following his dying wish. His recordings made over many years remain as a permanent monument to a great and beloved artist.

1 Canzonette (Salvator Rosa)

This must be one of the rarest of all Zenatello's Fonotipias since most people bought his better known operatic records, and yet it is quite delightful, being sung with careful phrasing, a fine sense of style and some full toned real mezza-voce passages. Salvator Rosa was a 17th century composer, later the subject of the opera of that name by Gomes.

2 Lucia di Lammermoor-Sulla tomba with Barrientos

Both artists are on familiar ground in this lovely duet in which Lucia persuades Edgardo to forget his anger and think only of their mutual love. Barrientos's effortless crystal clear tones blend well with Zenatello's singing in lyrical mood.

3 Norma-In mio mano alfin tu sei with Mazzoleni

In this duet Norma implores Pollione to return to her and to leave Adalgisa alone, swearing vengeance if he does not do so. Mazzoleni is highly dramatic, but too tremulous while Zenatello sings well in his few opportunities.

4 Mefistofele-Dai campi, dai prati

This is one of Zenatello's gems. The aged Faust looks out over the fields and meadows at Easter time and reflects quietly on the beauty and peace of the countryside. Zenatello sings with great lyrical restraint and uses his well controlled mezza-voce and piano singing to perfection.

5 Mefistofele-Fin da stanotte with Didur

In this duet from Act 1, Mefistofele vows to serve Faust as a servant, aiding him in his orgies in return for his immortal soul. Again Zenatello is shown at his lyrical best and the Polish bass provides a fine foil as Mefistofele.

6 Mefistofele-Giunto sul passo estremo

There is little to add. Zenatello as Faust is again old and despite the presence of Mefistofele he prays fervently for forgiveness in this lovely aria, beautifully phrased and with great tenderness.

7 Germania-Studenti udite

Loewe, the poet, incites the students to rebellion. It is exciting music and demands an exciting delivery which Zenatello certainly achieves with ringing high notes and good metal in the voice.

8 Germania-No, non chiuder gli occhi

Loewe marries Ricke and sings this lovely aria to his bride. For once Zenatello sounds a little insensitive and he cannot efface memories of Caruso's wonderful recording of March 1902

9 La Figlia di Jorio-Che c'e egli with Giraldoni

This is an important record since it is sung by the creators of the two roles. Giraldoni sounds very forceful and rather rough, and it is a relief when Zenatello sings in marked contrast. I imagine from what I can hear of the words that it is a duet between father and son, but I can find no details of the opera even in Kobbe. *

10 Andrea Chénier-Un di all'azzurro spazio *

Zenatello's first recording of the aria is technically not up to the Company's usual high standard. The surface noise is very high and in thsee circumstances even Zenatello's robust tones are less effective.

11 Andrea Chénier -Colpito qui m'avete *

This starts a little earlier in the score than the previous version but it is substantially the same passage, the famous 'Improvviso' in which Chenier starts by speaking of love but gradually changes to a fierce criticism of the French aristocrats. Happily the recording is excellent. Zenatello's free but highly dramatic singing is superb.

12 Andrea Chénier -Credo a una possanza *

Chénier refuses to leave the country although his life is in danger. He sings of an unknown woman who has written him love letters but remains a mystery. Zenatello is at his best in this lyrical outburst, with cleanly attacked ringing high notes.

13 Andrea Chénier -Si fui soldato *

Chenier says that he was a soldier and always fought for justice, he has never been a traitor and that if he has to die let it be with honour. This declamatory aria brings out the best in Zenatello, fearlessly attacking the high notes which ring out spendidly.

14 Die Meistersinger-Nel verno al pie

This is an Italian version of Walther's 'Am stillen Herd'. Although it presents no problems to the tenor it sounds strange in Italian especially since Zenatello sings in the Italian manner which is a world apart from the Wagnerian style.

15 Die Meistersinger -Appena in mite Aprile

This is Walther's first trial song 'Fanget an'. Although again the style is too Italianate it is difficult to resist Zenatello's spirited singing.

16 Les Huguenots-Bianca al par di neve

Although this is strictly speaking a French opera, it is possibly even better known in its Italian version. Zenatello sings the aria, in which he recounts how he saved a lady from the unwelcome attentions of some revellers, superbly in his most lyrical manner.

17 Faust-Salve dimora

In the past, when it was immensely popular, *Faust* was often referred to as 'the opera singer's grammar'. Certainly Zenatello sings the famous aria in superb style and lovely lyrical tone throughout.

18 Faust-Il se fait tard with Nielsen

The record actually starts at 'Laisse-moi, laisse-moi contempler ton visage' and is of course part of the love duet. Nielsen and Zenatello sing in French and it is a delightful version, equal to the famous Caruso-Farrar recording. Although this series is devoted to Zenatello's Fonotipia recordings, an exception has been made for this Columbia disc on account of its considerable rarity: it seems to have been issued only in South America. In addition, it is probably the only example of Zenatello singing in French.

19 Samson et Dalila-Figli miei

This is Samson's call to the Israelites to break free from the Philistine yoke. Zenatello revels in this stirring appeal and sings with great power and ringing high notes.

20 Carmen-Ah! mi parla di lei with Cervi-Caroli

Don José meets Micaëla, his childhood sweetheart, again and asks for news of his mother, from whom she has brought a letter. Micaëla adds shyly that she also sent a kiss! Don José was one of Zenatello's favourite roles. He sings with great tenderness. Cervi-Caroli is an indifferent and tremulous Micaëla. * *

21 Carmen-Il fior che avevi a me tu dato

This is a beautifully restrained but passionate version of the famous 'Flower Song'; the tenor takes the ascending phrase, culminating in a finely poised and focussed B flat, with consummate ease.

22 Il Guarany-Sento una forza indomita with Mazzoleni

This is a love duet between Pery, a tribal chief, and Cecilia, the daughter of a Portuguese officer, who tries to conquer the Guarany tribe in Brazil. Both artists sing well in this easily flowing music.

23 Vieni (Denza)

A typical Italian love song of a popular nature, sung by Zenatello in his most caressing mood and rising to a brilliant climax at the close.

24 La mia bandiera (Rotoli)

This disc was never published presumably because of wavering pitch in the recording, but this has been largely corrected in this transfer and there is certainly nothing wrong with Zenatello's singing. It forms an interesting addition to his legacy of recordings.

John Freestone

When Zenatello made his first records it was still the practice to use piano accompaniments. Within a short while the process of recording had advanced sufficiently for orchestral accompaniments to be used and artists whose records sold well were often asked to remake them. Thus many of Zenatello's Fonotipia records exist in two versions. In this series of transfers the piano versions have been placed before those with orchestra. This brings out some interesting points: to obtain a good balance with the orchestra the artist stood further back from the recording horn than before and the sound of the voice is markedly different. In the earlier versions Zenatello seems to be singing at times almost face to face with the listener and a voice this close is not necessarily heard at its best. Indeed in the sense that this is not a normal situation, the later versions are probably more like live performances. It is of course also possible that the voice was changing and perhaps the style too; perhaps no coincidence as around this time he began to sing Otello.

Later Appearances of Giovanni Zenatello

compiled by Tom Kaufman

Carnival 1925-6 Rome-Teatro Costanzi

Jan. 12	Otello (9 perf.)	B. Scacciati s. (later I. Pacetti s.) E. Molinari b. Falconi cond. (later: T. de Angelis cond.)
Feb. 13	Carmen (3 perf.)	I. Mion s. M. Gay ms. G. Vanelli b. Falconi cond.

Summer 1926 London-Covent Garden

July 1	Otello (3 perf.)	L. Lehmann s. M. Stabile b. (later G. Noto b.) V. Bellezza cond.

Summer 1926 Milan-Teatro Dal Verme

Sep. 15	Otello	M. Polla-Puecher s. G. Inghilleri b.

Winter 1928 Philadelphia-Metropolitan Opera

Jan. 18	Aida	Michita s. R. Toniolo ms. J.Royer b. W. Grigaitis cond.
Feb. 8	Tosca	M. Sharlow s. T. Ruffo b. A. Rodzinski cond.
Feb. 29	Andrea Chénier	M. Sharlow s. T. Ruffo b. A. Rodzinski cond.

Autumn and Winter 1928-29 Philadelphia-Academy of Music

Nov. 21	I Pagliacci	Flandina s. P. Amato b. F. del Cupolo cond.
Dec. 12	Carmen	D. Fox s. R. Toniolo ms. Reschiglian b. F. del Cupolo cond.
Jan. 16	Andrea Chénier	B. Saroya s. P. Amato b. F. del Cupolo cond.
Feb. 27	Un Ballo in Maschera	B. Saroya s. D. Fox s. R. Toniolo ms. P. Amato b. M. Fattori bs. F. Del Cupolo cond.

Symposium Records thanks Tom Kaufman and Paul Lewis for their help in the preparation of this record.

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