

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1170

The Harold Wayne Collection – Volume 20

Giuseppe Anselmi was born in Nicolisi in Sicily on 6th October 1876 and appears to have shown signs of exceptional musical ability at an early age. He studied violin, piano and composition from the age of twelve when he entered the Naples Conservatorio. Apparently he also showed signs of a remarkable voice, and by the age of sixteen he was singing tenor roles with a touring operetta company. He was heard by chance by Giulio Ricordi, who recognised in him great promise and urged him to study seriously for an operatic career. However, apart from being coached by the conductor Luigi Mancinelli, he does not appear to have had any formal vocal training, but to have been largely self-taught.

The date and place of his operatic début are uncertain, but he had a season in 1898, when he was only twenty-two, at the Sporting Club of Smyrna, and after that he spent two years in Egypt and Greece. His first major engagement was at the Politeama, Genoa in the autumn of 1900. His success there was so great that in 1901 he appeared at the San Carlo in Naples, the Massimo in Palermo and, finally, at Covent Garden where he sang in *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *La Bohème*. In the latter his Mimi was Melba. In the short space of three years he had reached the pinnacle of his profession. For the next three years engagements in South America, Poland and Russia kept him away from Italy, but in 1904 he returned to make a triumphant début at La Scala, Milan in *Rigoletto*.

For the next ten years his career was a truly international one, with engagements in Warsaw, Odessa, Buenos Aires, Lisbon, St. Petersburg, Barcelona and Madrid. He became rapidly the favourite of the Spanish public, particularly at the Teatro Real, Madrid where his popularity exceeded that of any other contemporary tenor, Caruso included. The opera lovers of Madrid adored him, and he adored Madrid to the extent that he bequeathed his heart to the museum of the Teatro Real.

In 1914 Anselmi was called up to serve in the Italian army, and apart from a few isolated performances in Valencia and Madrid, his career came to a temporary halt. He reappeared in 1918, but at the end of the year retired to Rapallo, where he started a music school in which he taught singing, piano, violin and composition.

He died of pneumonia in Zoagli on 27th May 1929 at the age of fifty-two. His heart was removed, as he had directed, and sent to Madrid. It can still be seen there today, preserved in alcohol, in the museum of the Teatro Real.

Anselmi obviously possessed a tenor voice of great beauty, extending easily to the high C. His breath control and technique are admirable, though his ability to sing a high note forte and then linger on it in a gradual diminuendo to a ravishing pianissimo does lead to occasional lapses of taste, but his best records are in every way superb examples of true bel canto.

There is no doubt that in certain of Anselmi's records there are problems of intonation. The main reason for this seems to be that he is inclined to exert tremendous breath pressure to produce his brilliant top notes and this has a tendency to sharpen them. I have not mentioned this in my criticisms which follow, except in isolated cases, but I feel that the fault has been much exaggerated by certain writers.

1 Don Pasquale-Sogno soave e casto Ernesto is told by his uncle that the latter intends to marry his ward, with whom Ernesto is in love. He feels that his dream of love is shattered and pours out his grief in this beautiful aria. This is one of Anselmi's finest records with lovely phrasing and exquisite piano passages.

2 Il Duca d'Alba-Angelo casto e bel Marcello and Amelia are lovers, but when she realizes that Marcello is the long lost son of the hated Duke of Alba she spurns him. In this magnificent aria he mourns the loss of Amelia's affection. This is another of Anselmi's finest records and, again, a model of true bel canto. (The opera is by Donizetti, but this particular piece is thought to have been added by one Salvi)

3 Luisa Miller-Ah fede negar potessi...Quando le sere Rudolfo learns of Luisa's apparent faithlessness and pours out his grief and bitterness in this wonderful recitative and aria. Again Anselmi is at his best and there are magical touches, as for example, when he deliberately breaks the phrase "allor ch'io muto. . ." thus intensifying the emphasis before he sings the final word "estatico". This is still my favourite version of the piece. It is noteworthy and to the credit of the Fonotipia company that the artist was allowed a complete side for recitative. Domingo and Pavarotti are pedestrian and uninspired by comparison.

4 La Traviata-De' miei bollenti spiriti Alfredo sings of his happiness in his life in the country with Violetta. The recitative beginning with "Lungi da lei per me non v'ha diletto" is included; it is a model of its kind, every word being given its true significance. At the conclusion of the aria there is a wonderful diminuendo on the high G of "Quasi" beginning forte and melting effortlessly into a beautifully controlled pianissimo.

5 Les Pêcheurs de Perles-A quella voce....Mi par d'udir Nadir and his friend Zurga both fall in love with the priestess Leila and as a consequence, rather than endanger their friendship, they vow mutually never to see Leila again. Nadir however is entranced by the beauty of Leila's voice when he hears it by chance, and in this aria he expresses his overwhelming desire to see her again. Anselmi is at his splendid best in the recitative, again he is allowed an entire side for it, but is not entirely at ease in the aria, tending to disturb the vocal line and over-emphasise certain words. However, he finishes the aria correctly, without the additional phrase at the close which most tenors sing but which is not in the score.

6 Mignon-Ah non credevi tu Wilhelm is watching at the bedside of Mignon who is asleep after a serious illness. He sings of his growing love for her. Anselmi's style is good but the voice, as recorded, sounds somewhat hoarse at times and there is some doubtful intonation.

7 Manon-Chiudo gli occhi Des Grieux is explaining to Manon how he hopes to share

his life with her and he describes an idyllic life in the country. He explains that all he needs to complete his happiness is to have Manon at his side. Anselmi sings most of the aria with gentle restraint and lovely lyrical phrasing, but he sings the top A at the climax almost explosively, whereas we know from his other recordings that he could have sung it much more delicately. After this he decides to add a high note which is not in the score and is stylishly wrong thus spoiling what at the beginning promised to be an almost ideal performance.

8 Cavalleria Rusticana-Siciliana The tenor is very much on home ground here, singing this serenade to Lola with ardour and eloquence. He manages the trying tessitura very well.

9 Werther-Ah non mi ridestar Werther sings this aria, the words of which are a translation of the Song of Ossian, conscious only of the presence of Charlotte, who is deeply moved. This is easily the best of Anselmi's recordings of French opera, with beautifully controlled diminuendos at the conclusion of each verse.

10 I Pagliacci-Vesti la giubba Canio's famous outburst hardly seems suitable material for Anselmi who excels so in the bel canto tradition. He rather overdoes the laugh - it sounds much too hearty - but sobs rather more convincingly at the end. It is difficult to imagine him in this role.

11 I Pagliacci-O Colombina This is much better suited to Anselmi's voice, technique and talent although it is rather over-robust and the music of the verismo school hardly shows him at his best.

12 Fedora-Amor ti vieta Loris sings to Fedora and tells her that although she may try to deny it, love forbids her not to love. This short but beautiful aria can almost be treated as one long crescendo phrase culminating in the high A at the climax. It is most effective when sung quite simply, starting softly, and gradually increasing the tone without disturbing the vocal line. Anselmi rather over-elaborates by introducing rhythmic changes and occasional pauses, and although he sings well these are really out of place in this context.

13 Iris-Apri la tua finestra This serenade to Iris does not lie comfortably for Anselmi. His lower register, not particularly strong, is fully exposed here. There are some brilliant high notes, but the tenor does not sound at ease and his intonation is more than usually suspect.

14 Manru-Come al sol cocente There is some lovely singing in the rather commonplace music of this aria. Anselmi finishes on a superb pianissimo high A, and despite the uninteresting material his performance is often quite magical.

15 Consolati e spera Domenico, son of Alessandro Scarlatti, was well known as a composer of songs as well as music for keyboard instruments. The title means "Be consoled and hope" and the song is a fairly elaborate aria beautifully sung and ornamented by Anselmi. The final high note shows some faulty intonation in what is otherwise a

delightful record.

16 Serse-Va godendo vezzoso e bello This is Romilda's second aria from Act 1 of the opera. It is presumably addressed to Xerxes, and the Italian means "Go, greatly rejoicing, charming and handsome man". Anselmi sings the runs and divisions splendidly. The only flaw is an over-loud high note near the conclusion. Altogether though, an accomplished and very musical performance.

17 Romanza-Un sol volta ancora This and the following song are early compositions of Mendelssohn to German texts - one wonders how Anselmi came to know them. 'Once more' is a pleasant tuneful song and Anselmi sings it easily with beautiful tone.

18 Canto alla primavera At least four of Mendelssohn's songs are to Spring - 'Frühlingslied'. Anselmi sings this one with splendid tone and eloquence making a very unusual and attractive recording. As I do not know the songs in the original German I cannot really comment as to how correct they are stylistically, but I imagine Anselmi makes them sound more Italianate than they would be in the original.

19 Domani This is of course the famous 'Morgen'. Anselmi starts correctly, with lovely tone and without exaggeration; I was prepared to enjoy his performance, but after the usual ending, the piano completing the picture, Anselmi inserts and lingers on a high note which completely ruins the atmosphere which Strauss has created so magically.

20 La Notte This is a straightforward account of 'Die Nacht' and it is well sung, but an Italian version of a German Lied does not allow it to be heard to its best advantage.

21 Mattinata The composer of this song, Leopoldo Mugnone, was a famous conductor. Beecham considered him the finest conductor of Italian opera of his generation. He is the accompanist, and Anselmi sings this rather ordinary song very well.

22 Spes ultima Dea A much more interesting song, again accompanied by the composer, and Anselmi sings it quite delightfully, with lovely tone and a magical finish on a beautiful piano high A.

23 Canzone Siciliano This is a typical Italian canzone - the kind of ditty you might hear sung any evening in a Sicilian trattoria or ristorante. Anselmi sings it pleasantly enough, but there are many more interesting recordings of the tenor.

24 No t'amo piu Tosti knew how to write for the voice and also how to write a melody; Anselmi knew how to sing these songs in his own inimitable way - the result is a delightful record.

25 Vorrei Another charming song by Tosti again splendidly sung by Anselmi with lovely tone and passionate sincerity, ending a with a beautiful piano 'Io t'amo'.

Dr. Wayne writes: With the release of this Anselmi CD from my collection the series has, for the first time, left the realms of extreme rarity.

Several Anselmi titles were still available as imports at Alfred Imhof's, of New Oxford Street, London and also at the Music Salon, George Street, Edinburgh in the early to mid-1920s. Indeed one would always expect to find him represented in the archive of any self-respecting or even minor collector by the post Second World War period.

However, I must emphasise that the relative rarity of titles is exceedingly high. Especially, most of the songs included here which are extremely difficult to locate. In the 1950s and 1960s one would have had to scour the length and breadth of Italy to discover such a record.

Imagine any Italian devotee choosing to acquire the Richard Strauss Lieder, not to mention the Mendelssohn pieces. Such material made poor sales and was soon deleted.

His records in Russian, which we shall issue later, together with some of Anselmi's own compositions fall into a similar category.

Specifically, the rarities on this CD are as follows: the Mugnone compositions and the Canzone Siciliana of Alagne - none of these was listed by Bauer in 1948. Of equal rarity are the two Strauss songs and the two of Mendelssohn.

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