

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1186

FRANCESCO TAMAGNO

28 XII 1851 - 31 VII 1905

The claim that no mere description or even a record can do justice to a particular artist is a common enough cliché. In the case of Tamagno, it is arguably literally true. This was the giant amongst tenors. During his short life, he spent nearly thirty years at the very apex of his profession. Two small pieces of evidence may suffice. In the 1900 season at Monte Carlo he appeared in 14 of the 19 scheduled performances at a fee of 125,000 francs, then equivalent to £5,000 which equates to a staggering £225,000 in modern money. The fact that Tamagno's fee was over a quarter of the entire opera budget throws an interesting light on current complaints of excessive payments made to today's star performers. Perhaps in all fairness it should be added that Tamagno did perform without charge that year in Monte Carlo in aid of the wounded of the Boer War. The other evidence of Tamagno's stature concerns the advance royalties for his first recording session at a time when the gramophone was still in its infancy. The story of Caruso's first payment of £100 for recording in 1902 has often been recounted. In January 1903 Tamagno's advance when the recording apparatus was brought to his own villa amounted to £2,000.

Despite the plethora of printed material there is a good deal of confusion over Tamagno's background and early career. Thus Grove's *Dictionary of Opera* repeats the assertion that his début at Turin's Teatro Reggio was in Donizetti's *Poliuto* in 1870. The opera was not in the repertoire that year. Similarly, P. G. Hurst asserts that Tamagno "never forgot the penurious times", whilst others comment on the promptness with which his father paid the special tax to keep him out of the war.

Tamagno's musical training was at best spasmodic. Allegedly he and his younger brother Giovanni sought entry to the Turin Conservatoire in 1868, but seem to have made no impact on the local Maestro, Carlo Pedrotti. Given that Giovanni was aged nine at the time, this may not be surprising. However, Francesco subsequently inveigled his way into the chorus of Turin's Teatro Reggio. On February 27th 1872 he made his début as second tenor in the local première of *La Colpa del Cuore* by Francesco Cortesi. It would be another overworked cliché to suggest that the rest is history: for the opera the end; for Tamagno the beginning. Little of his career was to be in his home town of Turin. The following season he sang minor roles in Gomes's *Il Guarany*, *Poliuto* and Marchetti's *Ruy Blas*. Some attention has been focused on the performance of *Poliuto* since it first brought the young tenor to the attention of the critics. He appeared as a late replacement for the indisposed Manfredi - not, as has been claimed, Mongini who was singing *Poliuto*, or the famous Masini as suggested in the latest Italian biography. Nor is there much evidence that Maestro Pedrotti was having serious second thoughts. He was to remain chief conductor at the Reggio, but Tamagno took an engagement at the Bellini Theatre in Palermo in January 1874 - in effect the beginning of his career.

In Palermo he sang in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, *Poliuto* and Rossini's *Stabat Mater*. During the next fifteen months he performed in Ferrara, Rovigno, Venice and Capri, adding to his repertoire, amongst other roles, Alvaro in *La Forza del Destino*, Edgardo in

Lucia di Lammermoor and *Robert le Diable*, in which his voice was described as magnificent. It was a short prelude to an international career. In October 1875 he appeared at the Liceo in Barcelona which was to be his chief artistic home for the next two years. Source material is scarce, but it was clearly in Barcelona that Tamagno learnt his trade, appearing in fourteen operas of which eleven were new to his repertoire. These were *L'Africaine*, *Les Huguenots*, Pacini's *Saffo*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, Marchetti's *Ruy Blas*, *Martha*, Schira's *Selvaggia* and four operas by Verdi: *Ernani*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Traviata* and *Don Carlos*. In less than four years from his first performance in Palermo, Tamagno was opening the 1877-1878 La Scala season with *L'Africaine*. With a repertoire of twenty operas, he was already at the top of his profession. He remained there for a generation.

In his first Scala season, Tamagno also appeared in *Fosca* by Gomes. However, an even more important career development took place in 1878 with his first voyage across the Atlantic. This was not to the United States of America, which was to play a relatively minor role in his career, but to South America, at that time a much more important locus for visiting Italian singers. Tamagno had nine South American seasons in all, the last in 1896. On each occasion he sang extensively in Buenos Aires, but he also appeared in five seasons in Rio, two in Montevideo and one in São Paulo. In 1890 he toured various cities in the United States and appeared in Mexico as well as Buenos Aires. He revisited Mexico and the United States in 1894.

Tamagno was a prodigiously active artist. In 1882 he appeared in no less than fifteen different operas in Buenos Aires: *Il Guarany*, *Poliuto*, *Robert le Diable*, *L'Africaine*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Forza del Destino*, *Mefistofele*, *Aida*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Ernani*, *Les Huguenots*, *Guillaume Tell*, *Le Prophète*, *La Traviata* and *La Juive*. In his one season with the Metropolitan Opera Company, in 1894-1895, he gave fifty-one performances in ten operas, also appearing in six concerts and all within a four month period. There were three London seasons. In 1889 he appeared at a short season at the Lyceum as *Otello* together with Victor Maurel, creator of *Iago*. He did not sing at Covent Garden until 1895, when he appeared in *Les Huguenots*, *Otello*, *Le Prophète* and *Il Trovatore*. His final visit to Covent Garden was in 1901 when he appeared in *Aida*, de Lara's *Messaline* and again *Otello*.

As a whole, the career is too vast to be covered in a short article, but it is hard to resist the conclusion that Tamagno was more at ease in Southern Europe and South America than in more northern climes. He clearly liked big fees, and both Covent Garden and the Metropolitan Opera could afford them, but his appearances there were limited. Interestingly, some of his reviews in the Anglo-Saxon world were less than ecstatic. W. J. Henderson heard him in New York in 1890 when "he gave the impression of uncommon intelligence and high ideals". By 1895 Henderson declared it "a truth and a pity that some of his recent work has done so much to destroy that (earlier) impression and to convince thoughtful persons that his *Otello* owed more to the training of the Maestro Verdi than to the natural ability of the singer". Herman Klein considered Tamagno "virtually unapproachable" in certain heroic characters, but commenting on his later appearances at Covent Garden, he found the voice to be "an organ of phenomenal power and range, if without real beauty or the redeeming quality of charm". George Bernard Shaw described him as "undoubtedly a quite exceptional artist, whose voice seems to have reached the upper part of the theatre with overwhelming power." However, he went on to suggest

that "His voice, at any rate, had not the pure noble tone, nor the sweetly sensuous, nor even the thick manly quality of the robust tenor: it was nasal, shrill, vehement, sometimes plaintive, always peculiar and original. Imitation of Tamagno has ruined many a tenor and will ruin many more; but the desire to produce such an effect as he did with *Addio sante memorie!* is intelligible to anyone who rightly understands the range of an Italian tenor's ambition". But it should be added that at the time Jean de Reszke, whose histrionic style and vocal characteristics were very different, reigned supreme in London as the tenor.

La Scala was Tamagno's real artistic home. He returned in 1879 for *Don Carlos*, *Le Roi de Lahore* and Verdi's *Requiem*. In 1881 he sang in *Ernani*, *Simone Boccanegra*, the first performances of the revised edition, and Ponchielli's *Il Figliuol Prodigio*. Early chroniclers of performances in Italian opera houses had the charming habit of adding a single word to each listing to define the performance. Increasingly the performances in which Tamagno participated were described as *Buonissimo* or even *Ottimo*. The Verdi evenings of that season must indeed have been sensational for the casts included Maurel and Edouard de Reszke. Tamagno's own performance as Adorno in *Simone Boccanegra* won a good review in the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, whilst *Teatro Illustrato* commented on the beauty of his high notes. In all Tamagno appeared in forty-four of the sixty-three performances in the main 1881 winter season. His next two La Scala seasons were 1884 and 1885 when he appeared in *Don Carlos*, *Les Huguenots*, *Le Prophète*, *Mefistofele* and the première of another forgotten opera by Ponchielli, *Marion Delorme*.

If one were to focus on the outstanding events of operatic history, all that has been written might seem like a lengthy prelude for the night of February 5th 1887 when Tamagno participated in one of the greatest triumphs on the stage of La Scala, the première of Verdi's *Otello*. It was the climax of Tamagno's career at La Scala, and, curiously, almost the end of it. In the 1887 season he sang the role on no less than twenty-five occasions and he returned for seven more performances in the 1890 season, these with Toscanini conducting. In between he quite simply took the opera he had helped to create around Italy and, indeed, the world; to Rome, Venice, Naples, Palermo, Genoa, London, San Francisco, New York, Nice, Lisbon, Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Monte Carlo, Mexico City, St. Petersburg, Buenos Aires, Paris and Dresden. Critics at premières are likely to concentrate on the music rather than the interpreters, the more so when the composer was Verdi, the national hero. However, a few lines in the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* said it all, Tamagno was "in truth unsurpassable both for the power of his voice and the effectiveness of his acting."

When Tamagno returned to La Scala, the impresario was Gatti-Casazza who later managed the Metropolitan Opera. Several pages of his autobiography are devoted to appearances by the great tenor as Arnaldo in *Guillaume Tell* in April 1899, "At the recitative by Tamagno a shiver ran round the house . . . I could hear the exclamations of surprise and delight by the spectators . . . Tamagno had accomplished wonders . . . he had determined with his tremendous trumpet-like top notes to slap a doubting public in the face . . . In the second act the great tenor excelled even himself . . . how to express in words the effect produced by that voice and that diction . . . and in the last act another surprise: Tamagno presented himself in a new character - that of a lyric tenor. He breathed the romanza, 'O muto asil del pianto' with a perfect *mezza-voce* . . . (but) then became himself again and in the cabaletta, 'Su corriamo,' sang with a formidable impetus (and) evoked a demonstration such as I rarely witnessed in my long career".

Even allowing for artistic license and lapse of memory, since Gatti was writing long after the event, this is tribute indeed. It complements the assessment of P. G. Hurst: "Although Tamagno had a voice of immense volume, it was of beautiful quality and used with unfailing taste. There was a softness in his timbre which was his alone, and completely devoid of any sense of strain. He could and did colour his voice with dramatic effect, and at his London début the audience was carried away both by the splendour of his singing and by his intensely tragic acting."

Almost all of Tamagno's recordings were made at a series of sessions in his own villa in February 1903. The early recordists had a very sharp sense of history and there is little doubt that they were determined to secure recordings by the creator of *Otello*. By then Tamagno was semi-retired, but the Gramophone & Typewriter Company was happy to go to him to ensure that posterity would be able to appreciate an interpretation already regarded as unique. Without their foresight, Tamagno might be no more than another legend. The recorded evidence demonstrates the perceptiveness of the tributes of both Gatti and Hurst. It also vindicates Shaw's assessment of the uniqueness of the voice and the sheer impossibility of imitation. No other Otello, be he Zenatello, Zanelli, Martinelli, del Monaco or Vickers, sounds remotely like Tamagno. Continuous listening also dispels any notion that this was merely a very big voice. The trumpet-like quality and the beauty of the mezza-voce are both present. Through the limitations of early recordings, one can only marvel at the voice and wonder what Tamagno must have been like in his prime.

And a postscript: At the beginning of this article I referred to Tamagno's brother Giovanni, who trained as a baritone. In the recordings made in February 1903 at Tamagno's villa are two which are clearly not by the great tenor. The singer is a cultured baritone. Some collectors have put two and two together to conclude that they are the work of Giovanni Tamagno. If this were indeed the case, the story which began with the certainly apocryphal story of both boys seeking an audition at the local conservatoire would end with a joint recording session. Very little is known of Giovanni's career. He was born in Turin in 1859 and died there in 1910. He possessed an excellent baritone voice and studied singing with Maestro Cima. He first attempted to appear at Novara, but so great was his panic on seeing the audience that his voice became completely paralysed. He tried again in 1884 at the Teatro Gentile in Fabriano and at the Teatro Scribe in Turin. At both places Germont père. He then left the stage for good and pursued a career in commerce in Buenos Aires. It is conceivable that the recorded voice on the two items is that of Giovanni Tamagno, but any evidence for this is circumstantial: that the villa was regarded as a family home and that it would have been reasonable and normal for the brother to have been present when the recordings were made.

There is similarly no contemporary evidence for an alternative suggestion, that the two unknown recordings are by the baritone, Antonio Cotogni, who happened to be visiting Tamagno at the time. One of the recordings is of an aria from *Le Roi de Lahore*. Cotogni had a huge repertoire but it does not appear to have included that particular opera.

Stanley Henig

Preparation of this article has involved reference to numerous English and Italian sources. I would like to thank my friend Tom Kaufman for supplying otherwise unavailable information about Tamagno's Spanish and South American performances.

TAMAGNO'S RECORDS

Negotiations between Tamagno and Alfred Michaelis, Director of the Gramophone & Typewriter Company (Italy) Limited, were well advanced before Caruso was recorded in April 1902, and were completed later that year. Tamagno's first records were made in February 1903. A letter from Michaelis to William Barry Owen, Managing Director of the Gramophone & Typewriter Company, London, dated 31st January 1903, describes arrangements for recording Tamagno at his home near San Remo on the Italian Riviera. "He has put two communicating rooms in his own house at my disposal, which seemed to me very good indeed for working purposes; all the furniture can be removed and [Will] Gaisberg can arrange everything as he likes - he can even close the rooms if need be. You will understand that it will be much easier to get more originals out of Tamagno at his own house than in a hotel. We shall have to make a good number of tests and he may have to sing a good number of times until we get a perfect original. I think it is good policy to make the thing as easy as possible for him. He would certainly object to singing the same thing many times over in a hotel where all the hotel would be listening, whereas he would be sure not to object at home". Michaelis' letter indicates the initial contract was for ten recorded items, though it was suggested twelve be obtained. As well as ten-inch discs a decision was made to record Tamagno on the new twelve-inch records. Tamagno's are the earliest known records of this size, the use of which was justified in part by the desire for high quality sound reproduction. "Have you decided about the size of the records? Please consider that many of the pieces are long and cannot be cut and that the end, which generally contains some of the most effective notes, is always inferior being too near the centre of the disc. When a song is in two parts this often prevents us giving the second part, which ought to be finer than the first, but instead becomes the contrary. This applies still more to an encore. There are two things which Tamagno must sing, one is the famous "Esultate" of Otello. This is the most famous piece of his, but it is short. If we do it on a 12" record he will make an encore, which I could not advise on a 10" because the encore would be inferior, which in the case of Tamagno would not do, as every note must be perfect. The same applies to "Di quella Pira" of Trovatore. Then of course there is the question that we could take in much more of his phenomenally powerful voice on a 12" plate, while on a 10" one he would have to moderate his voice considerably, which would be a pity as it is just his power, especially in the high notes, which makes his singing so unique. Lastly his records ought to be a speciality - also in size".

The recordist Will Gaisberg arrived at Ospedaletti on Wednesday, 4th February 1903, and it is believed that he recorded Tamagno's voice between Saturday 7th and Wednesday 11th February. On 13th February he sent a telegram from Milan to his London head office stating: "Sending today Hanover 27 ten inch 8 twelve inch Tamagno being 12 songs think everything grand. Report following instruct Hanover make samples immediately prescribing utmost care". The thirty-five recordings included multiple takes of the twelve "songs" intended for commercial use. These were probably in three, possibly four sessions. Some items intended for private use were made at a further session. As will be seen, these subsequently became of commercial interest. (The

grouping of these recordings in the discography is conjectural but is based on titles, turntable speeds, accompaniments and renumbering of the first 3005).

With a small number of exceptions, noted below, the vocal content of the alternative takes is remarkably constant, but there are major differences in the piano accompaniment: introductions vary considerably in length, while some takes, but not others, end with confident chords or flourishes. The pianist was evidently nervous in the first dozen or so recordings; there are many blunders, omissions and lapses of time. The accompaniments are played much more confidently in later items. Some records start or finish with prompts or chatter from those present. In some, talking can be heard even during the music. The recorded balance between voice and piano varies little from record to record, the voice sounding no more than slightly more forward in some takes than in others (compare, for instance, 3011 with 3006 and 3010).

Otello's opening phrases announcing the defeat of the Turks are sung almost identically by Tamagno in all four recordings. He clears his throat audibly near the beginning of three of these as one presumes he would have done in the theatre in preparation for his entry. The four versions of "Ora e sempre addio", Otello's cry after Iago's suggestion of Desdemona's unfaithfulness, are very similar. In contrast, the first two death scenes are substantially cut, the second in particular; only the twelve-inch version is near-complete. Tamagno repeated this version in 1904. Chénier's song of liberty is recorded in two versions; the second and third takes are expansive, lyrical accounts of the first half of the aria while the first and the fourth are compressed full versions, ending on an unconventional and unwritten high *Bb*. In the first of the two excerpts from *Le Prophète*, a love song, Tamagno starts slightly hesitantly. In the second excerpt, a hymn to the king of heaven, the first two takes betray traces of vocal insecurity towards the end. At the start of Manrico's serenade, Tamagno announces "I dedicate [this] to the memory of my father". The first take of Manrico's outburst, "Di quella Pira" contains an insecure-sounding final top C; the second version is better. Tamagno's voice breaks at the end of a phrase towards the finish of his second take of John's farewell to life in Act II of *Hérodiade*. The two versions of his Act IV song of eternal love are very similar. Duplicate recordings of Samson's rallying cry to his fellow oppressed Jews are virtually identical, as are those of Arnold's romance and call to arms from *Guillaume Tell*, the cabaletta of which is transposed down a semitone. "Dei del patri suol (Dieux de mon pays!)" from Messaline is a souvenir of the role of Hélion, which Tamagno created in 1899 in Monte Carlo. This arioso from the last act is sung a semitone above score pitch. The gladiator in the arena invokes "Melkart, Eckmonn, Baal" before throwing himself to the lions.

The recordings were rapidly processed and prepared for issue. A letter from Owen to Michaelis, dated February the 25th 1903 states: "We have heard one of the 12 inch Records by Tamagno - "The Death of Otello," - which was pressed from a shell which was injured in manufacture, and I frankly can say to you that it is by far the most artistic and most beautiful record it has ever been my pleasure to listen to, and if the balance of the records you have made of Tamagno compare in any way with this one, you will have the greatest set of Records the world has ever heard, and I predict that there is a future before the Gramophone which it could hardly have been anticipated to attain".

Arrangements were made for special labels with numbered tags, as stipulated by Tamagno, so that sales and thus royalties could be closely monitored. Issue numbers

were assigned. Sample copies were delivered to Tamagno at the end of February and were approved by him by 9th March. On 13th it was reported that Tamagno did not wish "Adieu vains objets" to be published "but will give us instead one of the private ones". The "Ave Maria" was suggested because of the "inconvenience of having a spoken dedication to his father" in the Trovatore aria and "one defect in the reproduction of a high note" in the Messalina. "If we choose as twelfth one of the 12", Tamagno will of course repeat it on a 10" plate at the next occasion". It was noted that Tamagno had been satisfied with his recordings and that he "spontaneously declared that he will sing a large number as a reserve in summer, as soon as he shall settle down for the season in his villa at Varese, near Milan". By 14th March Tamagno had chosen from the alternative takes those that he wished to be issued. These included "Esultate" take 2, "Corriam" take 1 and the lost twelve-inch "Niun mi tema" (mx 15). The twelve-inch records were for the time being kept in reserve. They were named "Gramophone Monarch Records" on 16th March (ten-inch records were "Gramophone Concert Records") and the first release of "Monarch" records - by artists other than Tamagno - was not until June or July 1903.

Commercial samples of the eleven ten-inch selections were ready towards the end of March. The first records, with serial tags No.1, were destined for Queen Margaret of Italy. The catalogue numbers of the eleven accepted ten-inch records were listed in a letter of 24th March.

Early in April it was decided to await a full twelve-inch set of Tamagno's titles before marketing them. On 14th July it was noted that "Tamagno will repeat what we like on large records". It was arranged that he should repeat the previous twelve-inch titles and record three "extraordinary new ones".

Tamagno's recording activity in the latter part of 1903 was limited to one item that was not published and which is not known to have survived. A letter from Michaelis to his London Headquarters, dated 8th October, states "Tamagno is going to sing next weeck [sic] for us the 12th Record he is owing us. He will sing the famous duet of Guarany, which he has sung in spring at Paris with Giannina Russ, who is singing for us too. This of course will be done on a 12" Plate and together with it we might publish the 12" Records made by Tamagno in February. He will also repeat some of the 10" Records which are not quite so fine as we should wish. This of course gratis as per agreement". This studio recording session, believed to have been on 21st October, was described in the *Gramophone News* of November 1903, which contained a report by Will Gaisberg of "the recent live and gramophone concert held in the Gramophone Laboratory in Milan". Various recordings were heard. "After this came the 'star' event of the whole concert. This was the actual making of a record. While everyone held his breath, especially myself, Tamagno and Madame Russ sang their famous duette, which only nine months ago all Paris had raved about. A wild scene of excitement and applause followed as the last notes were sung. So far as I can judge the record is a perfect one. If it turns out to be so it will have the greatest historical value, and has a distinct story of its own. There were musical people present who assured us that the value of such a record was inestimable. 'To charge only £1 for a true record of this duette is ridiculous' was the remark of one world-renowned musical critic".

Writing to Owen on 2nd November, Michaelis pointed out that the duet "makes the twelfth record which he owed us - it is 12". My idea now is to publish a series of 12" records by him, about which I shall treat in my programme letter".

On 6th November Michaelis noted that Tamagno had "consented to repeat all his records on 12" plates, less those already made on this size. He will sing on one record 'Esultate' and 'Addio sante Memorie'. (The set would be) completed by the 'Ave Maria' which we have already (and which) he authorises us to publish".

Tamagno sang for the recording machine for the last time in Milan in the studio of the Gramophone Company in April 1904. Two twelve-inch discs, "Niun mi tema" and the "Improvviso", were immediately followed Caruso's Pearl Fishers aria.

A letter from Michaelis to London dated 6th June 1904 notes that the duet with Russ "was recorded by us but did not turn out good and has therefore been annuled [sic]."

On 22nd February 1905 it was stated that Tamagno's intention was to "repeat the existing records on 12" records and to sing several new pieces". It was observed "He is a pretty old man now and his health is obviously breaking up". On 21st July 1905 Michaelis' successor Kenneth Muir wrote to London: "As you know I recently asked Hanover to send me samples from all the Tamagno matrixes in their possession, as I wished to get a clear idea as to what matrixes we actually have, and their quality. I have now carefully gone through these samples, and I find that we already have excellent 12-inch matrixes of the following records:

OTELLO - "Esultate" (two matrixes - one approved)

do. "Ore e per sempre addio sante memorie" (two matrixes both approved).

do. "Morte d'Otello" (Besides one on our catalogue, two other matrixes both approved - of these two one is more beautiful than the one selected for the catalogue)

ANDREA CHENIER - "Improvviso" (two matrixes - one approved)

WILLIAM TELL - "O muto asil" (one matrix - approved)

We therefore only require the following records to complete the list:

TROVATORE - Di quella pira"

SANSONE & DALILA - "Figli miei v'arrestate"

WILLIAM TELL - "Corriam corriamo"

PROFETA - "Sopra Berta l'amor mio"

do. "Inno"

ERODIADE - "Quand vos jours s'etaindront comme une chaste flamme"

We therefore have already five and still require six records.

Besides the above 12-inch records which Tamagno repeated, I find we have 12-inch matrixes of 2 other arias sung by Tamagno for his own private use. These are:

MESSALINA - "Dei del patrio suol" a fine record, and:

AVE MARIA - which however is defective in the recording. With regard to the first of these I propose to ask Tamagno for permission to place it on our catalogue instead of one of the others which he still has to sing. I am now going to make another effort to induce him to repeat the remaining five. If he does so, well and good, but if he does not, I really think that we ought to publish the 12-inch records which we have, leaving with them on the catalogue such 10-inch records as Tamagno has not repeated; the price to be irrespective of the size of the record as in the case of Melba. I think this would make a

very catching supplement if published on the first of September for the winter season, and ought to increase our Tamagno sales. It is also a good counter-move to the booming of the Bonci records by Michaelis [who had joined the rival Fonotipia company]. I have also gone through all the samples of the Tamagno 10-inch records whether on the catalogue or in reserve. Of these some which are in reserve are distinctly finer than the ones selected for the catalogue. If you agree to the above suggestion to bring out the remaining [sic] 12-inch records in September, and to withdraw the equivalent 10-inch records, I should recommend that all the matrixes of the latter should nevertheless be scrupulously preserved for use in the event of Tamagno singing for any other Company, as in that case, according to the contract the payment of royalty to him ceases six months after his singing for such a Company, so that we could then place the 10-inch records on the catalogue with the 12-inch ones, at a somewhat lower price if this was thought advisable".

On 21st August 1905 Tamagno had a stroke and he died at his home in Varese ten days later. Negotiations over his recordings continued with his heirs. A letter from Muir, dated 13th November 1905, states "Mr. Talamona, Tamagno's son-in-law, whos [sic] wife inherited practically the whole of Tamagno's fortune, paid a call at the office in my absence, with the object of proposing that we should place on our catalogue three Tamagno records which he originally sang for his own private use only. They are as follows: Concert records 3016 - 3017 "Erodiade" "Adieu vains objets" - Of these two 3017 is the better record, both being a little defective towards the end in the recording. Monarch record no. 20 "Messalina" "Dei del patrio suol" - Monarch record no. 21 "Ave Maria" both of these are very slightly defective in recording, and besides this in the Messalina record the last note was taken by Tamagno a little flat. The above three records are sufficiently good for trading purposes and have a special value and interest to us now that Tamagno is dead. Besides these three records of which I recently received samples from Hanover there is still an other concert record no. 3028 "Trovatore" "Deserto sulla terra" also sung for his private use, having been dedicated by him to his father; in my list of records there is a note that this record was approved by Tamagno, but when I received samples from Hanover of all Tamagno records of which the factory had matrixes, this sample was not among them. I am writing to-day to the factory to make another search, and if the matrix is found, to send samples here and to London, and also at once to send you samples of the three records mentioned above. Talamona of course asked that we should pay for these records, whereupon we reminded him that according to our agreement with Tamagno he originally sang one record too few for which he was paid. On the second occasion of his singing the 12-inch records he was reminded of this and sang the record in question which was a duet with the soprano Russ, 12-inch record no. 620 "Guarany" "Sento una forza indomita" But unfortunately the record was so defective that Tamagno ordered the matrix to be destroyed. After this, as you know Tamagno was never well enough to sing again, consequently at his death he remained a debtor to the Company for one record. This was explained to Talamona and he agrees to let us have one of the records mentioned in this letter without a cash payment, to supply the missing record". In the event, it was not until 1924 that the *Trovatore* aria was chosen as Tamagno's twelfth issued title. (Although given a single-sided number, it was published only on a double-sided record.) Meanwhile, the "annulled" duet with Russ had metamorphosed in correspondence into a tenor and baritone duet from *La Forza del Destino*!

The identity of the very fine baritone singer who recorded "Perché?", by the music critic and composer Filippo Filippi (1830-1887), and "O casto fior" from Massenet's *Il Re di Lahore* in February 1903 is unknown. His name is undocumented in the archives of the Gramophone Company. He was obviously an intimate of Tamagno to have been present and invited to interpose recordings between those of the tenor and may have been one of the studio audience heard in some of Tamagno's first records. He is clearly of considerable age, a very experienced performer and a consummate artist. The attribution, its provenance itself unknown, of these two records to Antonio Cotogni (1831-1918) is entirely speculative, yet attractive on the grounds of evident age, artistry, tremolo (criticised by Shaw in Cotogni) and similarity in vocal timbre and enunciation to the snatches of solo singing heard in the 1908 duet, "I Mulattieri" by Cotogni and Marconi. Cotogni's career overlapped that of Tamagno, and it is likely that they were close friends. Cotogni was one of the Covent Garden stars who took the night off to hear Tamagno's London début as Otello at the Lyceum on 5th July 1889. He may of course have been present as a coach, for by then he was a renowned teacher. The repertoire is a song by an eminent contemporary of Cotogni, who was Italy's leading music critic and a friend of Verdi and Boito, and a famous aria from an opera first performed at La Scala by Tamagno but not sung on the stage by Cotogni.

The French baritone Henri Berriel has also been suggested. Berriel was an early Milan recording artist and may have had some slight involvement in the Company. However, in 1903 he was a young man and his voice sounds very different from that on these records.

Tamagno's brother, Giovanni (1859-1910) is said to have possessed a fine baritone voice, but his stage career was minimal. He lost his voice completely on account of stage fright at his début, and after a few performances in 1884 abandoned his career "for ever", going into business in Buenos Aires. Although his name has been suggested, he cannot be the mystery baritone by virtue of his youth, inexperience and (possibly) domicile.

Paul D. Lewis

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