

## SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1191

### The Harold Wayne Collection – Volume 26

LÉON DAVID was born in 1869 and made an early début at Monte Carlo, as Euxerios in Desjoyeaux's opera *Gypsy* on the 9th February 1892. In the same season he appeared as the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto* with Melchissédec in the title role. On 9th June the same year he made his début at the Opéra Comique in *Les Troyens* and created the role of René in *Le Follet* by Lefèvre-Dérode on the 1st May following. He continued to sing principal tenor roles at the Opéra Comique and in major provincial theatres of France and at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels. In 1894 he returned to Monte Carlo to sing Jonas in *Le Prophète* and Cassio in *Otello* in both of which operas Tamagno was singing the leading roles. He was regularly at the Opéra Comique until his retirement in about 1916, but he was rather overshadowed by Clément, who had made his début there three years before him and whose repertoire coincided almost identically with his. Nevertheless, despite this competition he had a highly successful career in the French-speaking countries and, as his records testify, he was obviously a fine lyric tenor with a voice of considerable charm and an excellent technique.

JEAN LASSALLE was born in Lyons on the 14th December 1847, the son of a wealthy silk merchant, and it was originally intended that he should join his father in the same business. However, his magnificent voice was discovered and he studied at the Paris Conservatoire and privately with Novelli. He made his début in 1869 in Liège as St. Bris in *Les Huguenots*. He then appeared in Brussels also in *Les Huguenots* but as de Nevers. Finally, on June 7th 1872 he reached the Paris Opéra where he made a sensational début as Tell in Rossini's opera. He remained there for twenty-three years, becoming the principal baritone upon the retirement of Faure. He created leading roles in many operas including Scindia in *Le Roi de Lahore* by Massenet, the title role in Saint-Saëns' *Henry VIII*, Gunther in Reyer's *Sigurd* and Le Comte de Rysoor in Paladilhe's *Patrie*. He was a great favourite at Covent Garden and at the Metropolitan Opera where he appeared often in the company of such artists as Melba, Nordica and the de Reszke brothers. He retired in 1901 and taught singing at the Paris Conservatoire until his death in 1909. He made some early Pathé cylinders and then in 1904-5 recorded some songs for Odéon de Luxe and Pantophone. All are major rarities.

LOUISE BÉRAT sang regularly at Covent Garden for a number of years yet biographical details of her are almost impossible to find. She was born in 1882, presumably of French-speaking parents, and made her début at Covent Garden as Annina in *La Traviata*. She appeared always in supporting roles, comprimaria roles such as Mercédès in *Carmen* and Berta in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. Her most important role was Ulrica in *Un Ballo in Maschera* with Caruso, Destinn and Gilly heading the cast, on the 28th May 1914. She returned in 1919, after the First World War, to sing minor roles in *Rigoletto*, *Faust*, *Louise*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and *Roméo et Juliette*. Her most important role that season was Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* on the 17th May 1920, and her final appearance at Covent Garden was in Thaïs with Edvina in the title role. In America she sang with the Chicago Opera from 1910 until 1919, and was also engaged in Boston in 1914. She made

her début with the Metropolitan Opera on November 24th 1919 as the Innkeeper in Boris Godounov, and sang minor roles with the company. Her last appearance there was as Mamma Lucia in *Cavalleria Rusticana* on 7th January 1922. I have been unable to trace any further performances in which she was involved. She did not create the role of the Mother in *Louise*; Deschamps-Jéhin first sang the part, but she quickly made the role her own, particularly when Edvina was Louise. The few purple Lyraphone records of her voice, made in about 1906, are of extreme rarity.

EDMOND CLÉMENT was born in Paris on the 28th March 1867 and died in Nice on the 24th February 1928. He was originally intended to become a civil engineer, but his fine soprano voice changed into a light tenor of promise. He studied with Victor Warot at the Paris Conservatoire for two years and won a first prize for singing. On the strength of this he was offered a contract at the Opéra Comique, where he made his début as Vincent in Gounod's *Mireille* on 23rd November 1889. He was an immediate success and was quickly recognised as the leading French lyric tenor. He became a member of the company of the Opéra Comique and remained there for twenty one years. He was engaged by the director of the Metropolitan Opera, New York and made his début as Werther on the 16th November 1909 in the New Theatre, with Farrar, Gluck and Gilly. His first appearance in the Metropolitan Opera itself was as des Grieux on 6th December 1909 opposite the Manon of Geraldine Farrar. He sang with the company in 1910, but left the following year as he was dissatisfied with the choice of roles offered to him. During the First World War he was on active service in the French army and was wounded. While recovering he appeared in several concerts and continued to appear on the concert platform until 1927.

He recorded for Odéon, Pathé and Victor.

BLANCHE DESCHAMPS-JÉHIN was born in Lyon in 1857 and made her début in Brussels in 1879 as Mignon. She then created the title role in Massenet's *Hérodiade* at the Théâtre de la Monnaie, Brussels on the 19th December 1881. She reached Paris in 1885 making her début at the Opéra Comique in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. She married the Belgian conductor Leon Jéhin in 1889 and from 1890 onwards she was known as Blanche Deschamps-Jéhin. Her first major success in Paris was her creation of the role of Margared in Lalo's *Le Roi D'Ys* in 1888. She was also the first Mother in Charpentier's *Louise* on 2nd February 1900. She made her début in Monte Carlo in 1889 as Maddalena in *Rigoletto* and continued to sing there regularly, creating the role of La Baronne in Massenet's *Chérubin* on the 14th February 1905. She also sang regularly at the Théâtre de la Monnaie where she was a great favourite and her husband one of the principal conductors. She was the first Dalila at the Paris Opéra on the 23rd November 1892 and made her début at Covent Garden as Carmen on the 21st November 1891, with striking success. A typical criticism was "Merely to listen to so beautiful a voice would be a source of delight, but when combined with perfect command of expression and pathos it held every listener spellbound." She returned to Covent Garden in 1892 to sing Carmen, Fidès in *Le Prophète* and the principal contralto role opposite Melba in Bemberg's *Elaine*. She made cylinders for Pathé and Edison, but her only discs were four recordings for Odéon on which the orchestra was conducted by her husband. All four are included in this album.

LÉON MELCHISSÉDEC was born in Clermont-Ferrand in 1843 and made his début at the Opéra Comique in 1866. He sang there in a notable revival of Grétry's *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* in 1873 and created the role of Ourrias in Gounod's *Mireille* on 11th November 1874. He was the first Capulet in *Roméo et Juliette* at the Opéra Comique on 20th January 1872 and he sang the role of Pandolphe in the 100th performance there of Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona*, with Galli-Marié as the leading soprano. He made his début at the Opéra as de Nevers in *Les Huguenots* on 7th November 1879 and created the role of Hadjan Ben Said in Gounod's *Le Tribut de Zamora* on 1st April 1881. He was the first Tabarin in Pessard's opera of that name. He created the part of the King in Massenet's *Le Cid* on the occasion of Jean de Reszke's début at the Opéra; Plançon was also in the cast. He sang the role of Mercutio when *Roméo et Juliette* was transferred to the Opéra on the 28th November 1888 with Patti, Jean and Édouard de Reszke, and Delmas also in the cast. Melchissédec became a leading teacher at the Paris Conservatoire around 1900, and also wrote books including *Pour chanter, ce qu'il faut savoir* [What it is necessary to know for singing] and *Le Chant* [Song] of which I have a copy. His records are amongst the major rarities of the collecting world. There were some orange label Zonophones in 1902, some Pathé cylinders about the same time, and the APGA recordings which were made shortly after he signed a contract with the association in December 1906.

ÉMILE SCARAMBERG (1863-1938) was born in Besançon. For a time he was engaged as a horn player in a military band. His voice was discovered and after a comparatively short period of training he made his début at the Opéra Comique in 1893 in Grétry's *Richard Coer de Lion*. While singing in the smaller opera houses in France he was heard by Pedro Gailhard, the director of the Paris Opéra, who realized his potential and engaged him for his theatre. He made his début at the Paris Opéra in 1903 as Lohengrin with great success, and also sang as Roméo, the Duke in *Rigoletto*, Raoul in *Les Huguenots*, and Tannhäuser. He appeared in Monte Carlo in 1904 as Turiddu in *Cavalleria Rusticana* and was a highly acclaimed Werther of his day.

He made some splendid Fonotipia records in 1905-6 and these, together with those of Escalaïs, were the most popular Fonotipia records of French tenors. They are of course rarities now, but have been found more frequently than those of Cornubert, David and Jerome.

His career was cut short in 1907, when he lost his voice, after which he taught singing until his death.

## LÉON DAVID

1 Mignon-Elle ne croyait pas

Wilhelm gazes tenderly at the sleeping Mignon and expresses his growing love for her. David phrases the air with great sensitivity and his diction is excellent.

2 Werther-Pourquoi me réveiller

Werther sings his version of the Song of Ossian. David's voice is well suited to this air which he interprets with great expression but also with restraint.

3 Il Barbieri di Siviglia-Des rayons de l'aurore

This is a truncated version of Almaviva's opening serenade. David introduces some changes and demonstrates an excellent trill. Comparison with the recording by Clément is illuminating; Clément emerges a close winner.

4 Manon-Ah! fuyez, douce image

Here des Grieux implores for help to rid him of the memory of Manon. David sings with conviction making this an excellent version which again, it is interesting to compare with that by Clément. Again, I just prefer the latter, it is slightly superior as recorded.

## JEAN LASSALLE

5 Amour d'automne

All of these recordings of Lassalle are love songs which he sings with a voice of sensuous quality and with excellent diction. This song was obviously a favourite of his for he sang it for Pathé, Odéon and Pantophone.

6 Si tu veux mignonne

This charming salon piece starts with the line "Si tu veux mignonne nous verrons - If you wish my darling we shall see" which sets the mood for the whole song.

7 Chant Provençal

Again we have a beautifully presented love song beginning "Mireille ne sait pas encore le doux charme de sa beauté - Mireille does not yet know the sweet charm of your beauty". Towards the close Lassalle sings a lovely head note on the second syllable of "sourire - smile".

8 Les deux cœurs

The last of the group begins: "Le coeur que tu m'avais donné, ma douce amie - The heart that you gave me, my sweet love" sung with all the ardour of a lover. Lassalle obviously used these pieces as encores at his recitals.

9 Amour d'automne

This is an almost exact replica of his version for Odéon.

10 Le sais tu bien

This is again a love song and it is sung with a beauty of tone for which Lassalle was famous. Herman Klein wrote "he was glorious to look upon and listen to - probably the noblest male voice that France produced during the nineteenth century". Even in his retirement his voice retained much of its original beauty.

## LOUISE BÉRAT

### 11 Le pays du rêve

Louise Bérat was, as has been said, well known to opera-goers at Covent Garden in the years immediately before and after the First World War, although not in major roles. For us today, this record is a revelation: she possessed a lovely high mezzo-soprano voice, even throughout its wide range, and she sings delightfully in this charming song by Reynaldo Hahn.

## EDMOND CLÉMENT

### 12 Il Barbiere di Siviglia -Des rayons de l'aurore

Clément sings splendidly in this recording which, like that of David, is heavily cut to accommodate it on a single 10¾" side. He also introduces changes and produces some excellent trills. I feel that he has the edge on David though both are interesting and well sung.

### 13 Roméo et Juliette-Ah lève-toi, soleil

This is a really splendid version of Roméo's cavatina. He sings to Juliette telling her to awaken and rise like the sun, to eclipse the stars by her beauty. In her autobiography *Such sweet compulsion*, Geraldine Farrar refers to Clément as "an artist of the most exquisite taste and dramatic elegance". In this recording he fully justifies her remarks, singing with lovely tone and rising at the close to a superb B flat.

### 14 Manon-Ah! fuyez, douce image

Again, an immaculate rendering sung with perfect diction and an easy control of the difficult tessitura.

### 15 Il Trovatore-Le flamme brille

This is a French version of the aria usually known as "Stride la vampa". Azucena tells Manrico of the horror of her mother's death by burning at the hands of the count. Deschamps-Jéhin sings it with beautiful tone but some may feel it sounds rather uninvolved dramatically.

### 16 Samson et Dalila-Printemps qui commence

Delilah brings out all her powers of seduction in this lovely aria. Deschamps-Jéhin justifies her reputation as the first Delilah at the Paris Opéra, as she sings with lovely tone and smooth blending of the registers.

### 17 Samson et Dalila-Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix

As in the previous aria, Deschamps-Jéhin sings with luscious tone and uses her magnificent voice to complete the seduction of Samson. Only the first verse is given due to the limitations of the 10¾" disc.

### 18 Le Prophète-Ah! mon fils!

Here Fidès thanks John of Leyden for acknowledging that she is indeed his mother.

This version, splendid in every way, must take its place amongst the finest renderings of the aria. Deschamps-Jéhin sings with great authority and dignity, and an enviable command of legato.

19 L'Africaine-Fille du roi

Nelusko sings of his love for the sleeping Selika. Melchissédec obviously had a high baritone. The voice is absolutely steady, if a little dry in tone, and the top notes sound easy and resonant, which is a tribute to his method; he was 63 or at least in his 63rd year when he made these recordings and had been singing in opera for close on forty years.

20 L'Africaine-Adamastor, roi des vagues

Nelusko sings this fine ballad triumphantly, thanking Adamastor, god of the waves, for creating a storm. Melchissédec manages the high tessitura without difficulty but the voice again sounds a little dry in tone.

21 Un Ballo in Maschera-Oui, c'était toi

This is a French version of the famous "Eri tu" beloved by Battistini and a host of Italian baritones besides. The slower tempo of the aria allows Melchissédec more time to give the voice resonance and he sings well. Renato expresses his disgust for his betrayal by his friend Richard.

22 Rigoletto-O mes maîtres

In the second half of Rigoletto's great scena (Cortigiani, vil razza dannata) Rigoletto pleads with the courtiers to lead him to his daughter Gilda. Melchissédec sings it as well as the French translation allows. He was for years a famous Rigoletto at the Paris Opéra and this shows in his performance.

23 Don Giovanni -Sérénade

Again the voice is easily produced, but it lacks the warmth and seductive quality which suggest Don Giovanni, the great lover. He inserts a high F sharp at the close of the second verse which might offend purists, but was common practise in the early 1900s.

24 Roméo et Juliette-Air de Capulet

This is undoubtedly the best of Melchissédec's recordings for APGA. It is authoritative and a wonderful historic souvenir of the first Capulet at the Opéra Comique in 1893.

## ÉMILE SCARAMBERG

25 Les Huguenots-Plus blanche que la blanche hermine

This recording appears not to have been published, and for no apparent reason for it is one of the tenor's finest discs being sung with an authority and a dignity which make it one of the very best interpretations of this difficult aria.

John Freestone

*Dr Wayne writes:*

On this disc of a group of the greatest singers of all time, from the French school, we have some of the rarest recordings that exist. In particular, the Pantophone Company's output was minuscule. Lassalle's Odéon records are difficult to locate but his Pantophones probably exist only in a handful of copies anywhere in the world, and those of Fugère are in the same class. My excitement was extreme when I saw the great five-pointed black star motif, with its gold edges, and on it the name Lassalle. Paris was the source of most of these items, some from the unique de Bry collection, others from Guy Dumazert. Also, scouring the Flea Market in the early '60s produced some lovely discoveries on Odéon of David and one of Deschamps-Jéhin. Many famous names appeared on the label of the APGA company which was founded in 1906, greatest of all, Melchissédec. My copy of Don Juan/Roméo record was delivered to me at my London home by the eccentric New York collector, Marten Sodden, with the rare "Le Lac" of Plançon and a much sought-after disc of Roxy King. The Louise of Bérat was in the Professor Wilhelm Archive, and is an ultra-rarity. Scramberg's Huguenots deserves special mention as it was made some years later than the records in Bauer. Guy Dumazert offered it to me in 1967, but he did not seem to realise its importance. I believe it to be unique, the title in pencil on a grey label without mention of the singer. Of all these items, the only ones I ever saw on dealers' lists were occasional Odéons of Clément.

Acknowledgements: Symposium Records thanks Dr. Paul Lewis for assistance with the production.

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