SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1111

The Harold Wayne Collection – Volume 31

FRANCISCO VIÑAS, outside Spain he was usually known as Francisco Vignas, was born in Moià near Barcelona on the 27th March 1863. He studied singing in Barcelona with Tintorer and Goula, and made his début there in 1888 as Lohengrin. This was so successful that his fame quickly spread, and he appeared a year later at La Scala, Milan, again as Lohengrin.

He first came to England in 1891 and sang Turiddu in the British première of *Cavalleria Rusticana* with Sir Henry Wood conducting. In 1893 he made his début at Covent Garden with only moderate success, but later in the season he became a great favourite in many Italian operas, and sang there until 1904.

He was very popular in Naples at the San Carlo theatre, taking over the role of Lohengrin from De Lucia. Then, in 1893, he made his début at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, in *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Melba in the title role. She rather overshadowed the tenor, but later in the season he won great applause in the New York première of *Cavalleria Rusticana* opposite the Santuzza of Calvé.

He was highly acclaimed in Wagnerian roles and was also in operas by Verdi, Meyerbeer, Donizetti and some of the verismo composers.

He retired from opera in 1917, but continued to sing in occasional concerts and was also in demand as a teacher in Barcelona. He died on the 14th July 1933, in Moià.

His records were made in 1902-3 by Gramophone & Typewriter, and from 1905 until 1912 by Fonotipia.

AMEDEO BASSI was born in Florence on the 20th July 1874 and died there on the 15th January 1949. He studied singing in Florence with Pavosi and made his début in Castelfiorentino in *Ruy Blas* in 1897. He made his first appearance in New York as Radames in 1906 and came to Covent Garden the following year, first appearing there as Canio on June 7th 1907, and he created the role of Dick Johnson in the English première of *La Fanciulla del West* on the 29th May 1911.

He had the honour to be chosen to sing Radames in *Aida* for the opening of the new Colón theatre in Buenos Aires in May 1908.

He sang frequently in Chicago from 1910 to 1916, and finally, at the end of a long and highly successful career, he was chosen by Toscanini to sing Loge, Parsifal and Siegfried at La Scala, Milan in the period 1921 to 1926.

He recorded for Pathé Frères in 1904 and again in 1913, and from 1906 onwards for Fonotipia.

ALESSANDRO BONCI was born in Cesena, Italy, on the 10th February 1870 and died in Viserba on the 10th August 1940. He studied at the conservatoire in Pesaro, and made his début as Fenton in *Falstaff* in Parma in 1896. He was an immediate success and was soon singing all over Italy, including his début at La Scala, Milan, within the next twelve months. He sang at Covent Garden in 1900 and made his début as Rodolfo in *La Bohème* on the 22nd June to the Mimi of Melba. His voice and stylish singing were

immediately recognised, but with the advent of Caruso at Covent Garden two years later he found it difficult to become firmly established in England. He was, however, a great favourite in Italy, and made his début in New York with the Manhattan Opera in 1906. His final appearances at Covent Garden were in 1908, but he continued to sing in America until 1921 and did not end his career in Italy until 1935. He was a tenor who specialized in bel canto roles and was generally admired for his artistry, particularly in the operas of Bellini, Donizetti and Rossini.

He was a prolific recorder for Fonotipia from 1905 onwards, and later made some recordings for Columbia including a final session with some electric recordings in 1926.

ESTER MAZZOLENI was born in Sebenico on the 12th March 1883, and after studying literature, she turned to music and began serious vocal study with Ravasio di Zara. She made her début at the Costanzi Theatre in Rome, singing the role of Leonora in *Il Trovatore* on the 24th January 1906. Her success was immediate and she made her début at La Scala, Milan on the 19th March 1908 in *La Forza del Destino*, with Toscanini conducting. She was particularly famous for her Aida and other dramatic roles. Although she retired from the operatic stage in 1925, she continued to sing in concerts until 1929. From then until 1953 she was Professor of Singing at Palermo Conservatory. She died in Palermo in 1982.

Mazzoleni recorded for Fonotipia from 1908 until 1917.

1 Le Prophète-Sopra Berta, L'amor mia.

This is the second recording Vignas made of the aria and it benefits from the orchestral accompaniment. John of Leyden refuses to join the Anabaptists and sings that he is only interested in marrying Berta, for whom he sighs. This is a really splendid record. Vignas sings the aria with great power and purity of tone allied to excellent enunciation.

2 L'Africaine-O Paradiso

This is one of the first batch of recordings for Fonotipia and dates from February 1905. Vignas is in fine voice, singing the famous aria in which Vasco da Gama waxes lyrical about the beauty of the scene. Again the high notes ring out splendidly and make this one of the finest of the early recordings of this famous passage.

3 Lohengrin-Da voi lontano

This is Lohengrin's narration (Graalserzählung). He announces to the assembled company that he comes from a distant land which men call Monsalvat. Vignas was a very famous Lohengrin, but of course he always sang the role in Italian, and indeed in a very Italian style. I admire the singing, but I do prefer my Wagner in German!

4 Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg-Dell'alba tinto

There is really very little to add to my criticism of the previous recording. This is actually "Morgenlich leuchtend"; Walther's Prize Song, and again the singing is splendid.

5 Aida-Celeste Aida

This is another of the artist's first batch of recordings. He sings the famous love song of Radames with plenty of youthful ardour and splendid high notes. Like most tenors, however, he ignores Verdi's marking of the final B*b* as piano and morendo, but no doubt finishing on a ringing powerful high note is more effective in the theatre.

6 Aida-Pur ti riveggo... Fuggiam gli ardori inospitti

In this famous scene Aida persuades Radames to flee with her and he finally discloses

where the Egyptian army will be assembled, and unwittingly betrays his country. Vignas is in resplendent voice throughout and there is no doubt about Mazzoleni's deep dramatic commitment, although the rather wide vibrato which she uses will appeal to Italian listeners more than to Anglo-Saxon tastes.

7 Otello-Ora e per sempre addio

This is the first of Otello's great outbursts of rage. Iago has poisoned his mind so that he believes that Desdemona has betrayed him. "Now and forever goodbye to sacred memories". Vignas is in his element here and this is one of the finest recordings of the passage that I have heard. There is tremendous power and passion, and utterly convincing intensity.

8 La Gioconda-Cielo e mar!

Enzo arrives on the deck of his ship to take the watch. He is overwhelmed by the beauty of the night, with the moonlight shining on the clear waters of the sea, and he is expecting to see Laura, the woman he loves. Vignas is once again in superb voice and sings with deep feeling and lovely vocal quality.

9 Lorenza-Ecco mia giovinezza

I have been unable to find a score of this little known work. The title can be translated as "Behold my youth" and it is obviously a love song. The music is tuneful and it is sung with great feeling.

10 Donna Clara (Gastaldoni)

This is a very pleasant little love song with the singer repeatedly stating "Io voglio t'amare" (I want to love you). Vignas lightens his voice and sings with great charm.

11 Mi Niña (Guetary)

This is another love song, this time sung in Spanish. Vignas again invests a pleasant trifle with immense grace.

12 Se ti dicessi - Stornello (Amadei)

"Stornello" means "a little ditty" which is just what this is. It is sung very beautifully in Italian. The title can be translated as "If I told you" and Vignas makes it quite clear that he is in love.

13 María (Guetary)

The tenor sings this in Spanish and as with the other songs in this recital he uses his beautiful voice with great artistry. María is the lucky recipient of his admiration!

14 La Partida (E. Mandeno)

After a series of fairly conventional love songs in Italian and Spanish this is strikingly different. The vocal line is intricate and Vignas sings it with ease, tremendous agility, and infectious rhythm. This would be a candidate for my "Desert Island Discs"!

15 Fedora-Amor ti vieta

In this lovely arioso Loris pleads with the Princess Fedora to return his love saying that his love forbids her not to love him. Bassi sings the aria with great feeling and since he is accompanied on the piano by the composer himself one knows that this is in every way the authentic version.

16 Siberia-Orride steppe

In both these excerpts from the opera the piano accompaniment is by the composer, but even that does not give the music more than the interest of a novelty. In this passage which means "terrible steppes" the singer does all that he can to create interest by his impassioned singing.

17 Siberia-T'incontrai per via

Once again Bassi does his best with very ordinary material. No doubt it was the fact that Giordano was a director of the Fonotipia Company which accounted for the recording of these titles.

18 Tess-Stanotte ho fatto un sogno

The opera was given at Covent Garden on the 14th July 1909 with Destinn, Zenatello and Sammarco in the leading roles. Baron D'Erlanger was a wealthy patron of the arts and a composer of some merit, but despite the distinguished cast the work had only a limited success. It was repeated at Covent Garden the following year with Ricardo Martin as Angel Clare, but was then dropped from the repertoire altogether. Bassi makes the most of this scene in which Angel Clare tells Tess that the previous night he dreamt of her. No doubt the presence of this composer, too, on the board of Fonotipia was a factor in persuading Bassi to record this passage.

19 Canzone Guerresca (Giordano)

This song of war, which completes Bassi's recordings for Fonotipia, has, most unusually, a trumpet obligato. It is a further example of a record on which the composer accompanies. Bassi enjoys himself immensely in this declamatory music. It suits him admirably and the result is quite exciting.

20 La Favorita-Spir’to gentil

Fernando, a young novice, sings of his love for Leonora, the king's mistress, but when he hears of her relationship with the king he prays that all thoughts of her may be banished from his mind. Bonci sings this bel canto aria in superb style and displays a splendid high C in the process.

21 Luisa Miller-Ah fede negar potessi... Quando le sere

In this recitative and aria the son of Count Walter is under the impression that Luisa, whom he loves deeply, has betrayed him. Again Bonci shows his mastery of the bel canto style in this very fine version of the music.

22 Les Pêcheurs de Perles-Mi par d'udir

This is the Italian version of the aria originally known as "Je crois entendre encore". Nadir, a fisherman, has heard the priestess Leila sing a sacred incantation and he is entranced by the beauty of her voice. Bonci is in his element here, floating the tone beautifully on the breath and displaying marvellous control in the long phrases. I was particularly pleased, also, to note that he sings the music as Bizet wrote it, without adding the final phrase which is often included to show off the singer's high notes.

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