

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1261

SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI FONOTIPIA – MILANO

CONTENTS

- | | | | | |
|----|--|--|---------|-----------|
| 1 | Lakmé (Delibes) Dov'è l'Indiana bruna?
Maria Barrientos | XPh 30 | 39013 | 21-X-04 |
| 2 | La Forza del Destino (Verdi) E l'amante
Giannina Russ & Oreste Luppi | Xph 41 | 39055 | 21-X-04 |
| 3 | Rigoletto (Verdi) Ah! Deh non parlare al misero
Riccardo Stracciari | ooPh 128 | 9004 | 21 XII 04 |
| 4 | Printemps nouveau (Paul Vidal)
Amélie Talexis | XPh 389 | 39346 | 12-X-05 |
| 5 | L'Africaine (Meyerbeer) Averla tanto amata
Ramón Blanchart | XPh 428 | 39383 | 6-XI-05 |
| 6 | Lohengrin (Wagner) Di, non t'incantan
Giuseppe Borgatti | XPh 1517 | 39407 | 13-XII-05 |
| 7 | Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (Wagner) Nel verno al piè del focolar
Giuseppe Borgatti | XPh 1524 | 39408 | 14-XII-05 |
| 8 | La Vita Brettone (Mugnone) Vivea nel tempo antico
Adamo Didur; G. Nastrucci, vln. | XPh 1662 | 39490 | 26-II-06 |
| 9 | Lucrezia Borgia (Donizetti) Come è bello, quale incanto
Maria De Macchi | XPh 1916 | 39832 | 28-V-06 |
| 10 | La Gioconda (Ponchielli) Cielo e mar!
Giovanni Zenatello | XXPh 2373 | 74031 | 29-I-07 |
| 11 | Un Ballo in Maschera (Verdi) Che v'agita così?... Dell città all'ocaso
Eugenia Burzio, Elisa Petri and Giovanni Zenatello | XXPh 2456 | 74045 | 11-II-07 |
| 12 | Poliuto (Donizetti) Di quai soave lagrime
Maria De Macchi | XPh 2554 | 39901 | 17-IV-07 |
| 13 | Tess (Frederic d'Erlanger) Stanotte ho fatto un sogno... Il sogno è la coscienza
Alessandro Bonci | XPh 3403 ² /3404 ² | 92218/9 | 21-VII-08 |

- | | | | | |
|----|---|----------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 14 | La Bohème (Puccini) Che gelida manina
Giuseppe Anselmi | XXPh 4053 | 74032 | 2-X-09 |
| 15 | La Gioconda (Ponchielli) Cielo e mar!
Giuseppe Anselmi | XXPh 4253 | 74029 | 17-I-10 |
| 16 | La Gioconda (Ponchielli) Intermezzo Atto.III (Prelude to Act IV)
Orchestra del "Teatro alla Scala" Diretta da M.° R. Bracale | XPh 4510 | 92820 | 28-I-11 |
| 17 | Partita No.3 in E BWV 1006 (Bach) 3rd movement-Gavotte en Rondeau
Jacques Thibaud | XPh 532 ³ | 39087 | 1904/1905 |
| 18 | Patrie (Sardou) Dolorès et le Duc d'Albe (Scène du 3 ^e Acte)
Victorien Sardou | XPh 560 | 39091 | 1904/1905 |
| 19 | Rondo Capriccioso Op.14 in E major (Mendelssohn)
Marie Roger-Miclos | XPh 739 | 39256 | 1905 |
| 20 | Schwanengesang D.957 (Schubert) No.5 Aufenthalt
Emmy Destinn | XPh 1017 | 39423 | 29-XI-05 |
| 21 | I Pagliacci (Leoncavallo) Prolog
Theodor Bertram | XPh 1037 | 50015 | 11-V-06 |
| 22 | I Lombardi (Verdi) Or tu m'ascotta...Qual volutta trascorrere
Fernanda Chiesa, soprano, Carlo Albani, tenor and Luigi Manfrini, bass | xM 1813/xM 1913 | 1813/1913 | 1913 |

This Compact Disc is issued to mark the centenary of a small company which issued many of the world's most historically and musically significant operatic records. It was founded when opera composition was still a living art form. It sold its first record only three years after the death of Verdi and its last issues included music from Puccini's last opera. It engaged many of the greatest singers of the epoch, some of whose careers take us back well into the 19th century. Many issues were in very small editions so that surviving copies, especially in fine condition, are highly prized today.

Many accounts of its origins, often romantic and inaccurate, have been swept aside through the researches of Frank Andrews, published in a series of articles in *The Talking Machine Review – International* [Editor: E. Bayly] in the late '70s, and assembled under one cover as a booklet issued in association with *The FONOTIPIA LEDGERS 1904-1939* [Symposium CD-ROM 1139] in 2002. This album is about the music recorded, however a few general comments may be helpful.

Società Italiana di Fonotipia originated as a minor part of the International Talking Machine Co.m.b.H. of Berlin, which made Odeon records. Recording, processing of waxes, production of metal masters and stampers, and pressing of

discs for Fonotipia and for Odeon were part of the same operation in the same premises. They differed only in their labels and that artists generally appeared on one label or the other. In effect Fonotipia was Odeon's Italian agent, contracting artists for its own label in Italy. Nevertheless, Odeon did record for itself in Italy, Fonotipia did make small numbers of records in Berlin and Paris and some records were issued with the label of the other.

Over the years Fonotipia passed through many hands, thus in April 1906 Fonotipia Limited, an English company, became the owner of the Società Italiana di Fonotipia of Milan and its Fonotipia disc records. Thus Fonotipia, Jumbo and Odeon records of the time were stamped, "Made for the Fonotipia Companies".

The first Fonotipia issues were single-sided. The label, with its angel holding a lyre in one hand, whilst with the other operating what appears to be a book-press from which emerges a stream of records, presented a romantic and unforgettable image. Very soon double-sided discs appeared, and, like Odeon records, they were mostly of 10³/₄"/27cm (xPh) and 12"/30cm (xxPh) diameter, but there were a few 7¹/₂"/19cm (ooPh) and 13³/₄"/35cm (xxxPh) records. The latter, with their longer playing time, include interesting operatic items, but, owing to their higher cost and greater fragility, few copies survive today. Although the company existed from 1904 to 1948, the most culturally valuable records are mainly from the earliest years and in any case there was little activity after the mid-'20s.

A mystery: Rumours of records by the great Polish tenor, Jean de Reszke abound, but what are the facts? Certainly Jean de Reszke did enter Fonotipia's Paris studio as he is credited as accompanist on records of his wife. His name appears on some lists of artists, so presumably the company expected him to sing too. There have been claims that records were made, but that when he heard them he ordered them to be destroyed. However, there is evidence that he refused to be recorded on the grounds that there was no adequate means of ensuring that records were played at correct speeds. Two records are listed in Bauer's *Historical Records 1898-1909*, but despite diligent searches, the first when Fonotipia's matrices were still stored by the Odeon company, no records have ever been found.

How were 22 records chosen for this album from the 6,712 matrices the company made? All the material in this album is new to the Symposium catalogue. Thus Félia Litvinne, Léon Escalaïs and Victor Maurel, for example, whose Fonotipia records have all appeared already, are excluded, but the opportunity is taken to include items by Giuseppe Anselmi and Giovanni Zenatello which were not available when earlier issues of their records were being prepared. Lastly, there are examples, too, from Fonotipia's excursions to Paris (tracks 17-19) and Berlin (tracks 20-21), and from its small, but significant, non-vocal repertoire.

MARIA BARRIENTOS (Barcelona 1884-San Juan de Luz 1946) studied piano and violin before taking up singing. Her début in *La Sonnambula* in her native city in 1898, seemingly at the age of 14, opened an international career in the 'bel canto' repertoire, leading to appearances with Caruso at the Metropolitan Opera. From the early '20s she appeared more in recital as her voice began to age. In retirement she taught in Buenos Aires.

GIANNINA RUSS (Lodi, near Pavia c.1873-1878-Milan 1951) studied piano, but changed to voice. At her début as a concert artist in 1903 she sang a duet with no less than Francesco Tamagno. After appearances in opera at Bologna she went on to Cairo, New York (Manhattan and Metropolitan), London and St. Petersburg, singing always with major artists. Her career was centred on the works of Verdi, but she was also the greatest Norma of her age. After retiring from opera (1922) and from the concert platform (1925) she taught in Milan. Russ died in the Casa di Riposa, Verdi's endowment for musicians without adequate means.

ORESTE LUPPI (Rome 1876-Milan 1962) studied in Rome and made his début in 1892 at Foligno. His career was mainly in Italy, but he did appear at Covent Garden and was very popular in South America. He retired c.1919 and taught in Milan. He, too, died in Verdi's home.

RICCARDO STRACCIARI (Casaleccio di Reno, near Bologna 1875-Rome 1955) intended to become an electrical engineer, but, whilst singing in an operetta chorus, his voice attracted the attention of the Marchesa di Tallon, who financed his studies under Nasetti in Bologna. After his début in Bologna in 1898 as Marcello in *La Bohème* he gained experience in various Italian towns and travelled to Portugal and Chile. From 1905 he sang often at La Scala and achieved great success at Covent Garden, the Grand Opéra and the Metropolitan Opera. After 1944 he taught. This very rare record is one of Fonotipia's very few in the small 7½"/19cm size.

AMÉLIE TALEXIS (Toulouse c.1875-Calais 1911) studied cello and piano and won a prize at 13. She then moved to Paris to study voice under Paul Lhérie and Rondile. After her début as Marguérite in *Faust* at Bordeaux in 1899 she appeared in New Orleans, then with growing success in French repertoire and also in such parts as Aida and Donna Anna in many west European towns, in Buenos Aires, Mexico and Havana. She died following an accident in an hotel.

RAMÓN BLANCHART (Barcelona 1860-San Salvador 1934) made his début in *Faust* in 1885 then, after two years' study, re-appeared as Alfonso in *La Favorite* at Seville. He gained experience in Spain, South America and Italy in such roles as Amonasro, Don Carlo (*Ernani*), Hamlet and Nevers (*Les Huguenots*). In 1900 he sang in Moscow and St. Petersburg and in 1901 he came to Covent Garden as the Flying Dutchman (in Italian). In 1892 he sang Iago at La Scala, alternating with Victor Maurel. He was much liked in many North American opera houses.

GIUSEPPE BORGATTI (Cento 1871-Reno 1950) was overheard singing whilst working as a stone mason, and was persuaded to study. After a début in 1893 at Castelfranco, Veneto, he reached La Scala in only three years, creating the title role in the world première of *Andrea Chénier* in 1896. He became Italy's leading Wagnerian tenor, singing Siegfried for Toscanini at La Scala. However, he lost his sight after which he sang in concerts and taught. His pupils included Heddle Nash.

ADAMO DIDUR [Sanok, Galicia 1874-Katowitz 1945] studied in Lemberg with Walery Wysocki. A patron enabled him to study further in Italy, where in 1894 he made his début in the “Choral” Symphony. His stage début was in Rio de Janeiro and he came to La Scala in 1896. He was much encouraged by Battistini. He sang at Covent Garden in 1905 and 1914. In 1908 Plançon retired and, Chaliapin being poorly received at the Metropolitan Opera, Didur was snatched from the competing Manhattan house whilst briefly between contracts. He continued to sing there until 1933, when he returned to Poland and taught.

MARIA De MACCHI (Peruzzaro, near Turin 1870-Milan 1909) studied in Turin and made her début in the alto part of Laura (*La Gioconda*) at Brescia in 1889. However her voice moved to dramatic soprano so that in 1892 a second début followed as Leonore (*La Forza del Destino*) at Civitanova. From 1892 to 1903 she sang to increasing acclaim in Malta, Moscow, Kiev, Lisbon, Madrid, Prague, Bucharest and Berlin. In addition she was appearing in Italy. In 1904 she was at the Metropolitan Opera in *Lucrezia Borgia* with Caruso and Edyth Walker, and in 1905 at San Francisco. Her repertoire ranged through Marguérite (*Faust*), Norma, Rachel (*La Juive*), Die Königin von Saba (Goldmark), Aida, Lucrezia Borgia and Elisabeth (*Tannhäuser*). She retired in 1908.

GIOVANNI ZENATELLO (Verona 1876-New York 1949) made his début in the baritone part of Silvio in *I Pagliacci* in 1898 at Venice. Like Melchior, Jean de Reszke and Zanelli, it was then realized that he should retrain as a tenor. Thus in 1899 he had a second début as Canio at Naples. As a dramatic tenor he was soon in great demand throughout Italy. From 1902 to 1907 at La Scala he was in many premières, including *Siberia* (Giordano), *La Figlia di Jorio* (Franchetti), the first unsuccessful *Madama Butterfly* and *Pique Dame*. He sang Otello over 500 times, after Tamagno, sharing success in the role only with Slezak. He was praised in the capitals of Europe and in both Americas. In 1909 he substituted for Caruso, who was ill, but these were his only appearances with the Metropolitan Opera. In 1934 he retired and, with his wife, Maria Gay, opened a singing studio in New York.

EUGENIA BURZIO (Poirino, near Turin 1879-Milan 1922) appeared at the age of nine playing the violin, but she studied singing in Milan and made her début in 1899 as Santuzza at Turin. For five years she sang in Italy and in South America. At La Scala in 1906 she sang with Sobinov, Zenatello, Stracciari and Giraltoni. She was well received and her vocal agility commended, but a deep quarrel with Toscanini did not help the severe nerve problems from which she suffered throughout her career and which perhaps led to her retirement and early death. For one critic she was “a revelation as singer and actress... a beautiful voice with clear and limpid, timbre... the complete singer uniting vocal power and colour”.

ELISA PETRI (Fabriano, Marche 1869-Milan 1929) studied at Pesaro and made her début at Rome in 1889 in the Italian première of *Patrie* (Paladilhe). She was very popular in Italy, Spain and South America. She sang soprano and alto roles, thus her repertoire included Amneris, Brangäne, Laura, Marguérite (*La Damnation de Faust*), Mimi and Ortrud. In retirement she taught in Milan.

ALESSANDRO BONCI (Cesena 1870-Viserba near Rimini 1940) started as a cobbler's apprentice, but, his voice noted, he studied with Coen and Pedrotti in Pesaro and with Sedie in Paris. After some time as a chorister, his début at Parma was soon followed by successes throughout Europe. He sang for a number of seasons in North America. When the war started he returned home to volunteer for the Italian air force. In 1916 he resumed his career with further great successes in Italy and both Americas. From 1923 he taught, at first in New York, then in Italy. After re-appearing at La Scala in 1926 he retired completely. At the Manhattan Opera Bonci sang in direct competition with Caruso, and he was undoubtedly Fonotipia's answer to Caruso. Orchestral accompaniment has replaced the piano. Frederic d'Erlanger was a member of a banking family with interests in Fonotipia.

GIUSEPPE ANSELMINI (Nicolosi, Catania 1876-Zoagli, near Rapallo 1929) studied composition, piano and violin at Naples Conservatory and at 13 made his début as a violinist. Next he seems to have joined an operetta company in which he was heard by Giulio Ricordi, who enabled him to study with Luigi Mancinelli. After his début as an opera singer, probably in Greece around 1897, he toured Egypt and Turkey. His Italian début was at Genoa in 1900. In 1901, presumably on Mancinelli's recommendation, he came to London for a season which included *La Bohème* with Melba. Only after successes in Buenos Aires and Warsaw did he appear at La Scala. In 1907 he sang in Madrid, where, esteemed beyond both Bonci and Caruso, he returned frequently. Anselmi retired at 42. Strangely, he never sang in New York.

ORCHESTRA del "TEATRO ALLA SCALA" Diretta da M.^o R. BRACALE
Fonotipia's catalogue included around 450 recordings by the Italian Marine Band and about 100 of the La Scala Orchestra. In each case the fare was largely opera overtures and pot-pourri, but one could also buy Mozart's Masonic Funeral Music, the Peer Gynt Suite and Beethoven's 5th Symphony.

JACQUES THIBAUD (Bordeaux 1880-1953) intended to be a pianist, but hearing Beethoven's violin concerto converted him to the violin. At 9 he impressed Ysaÿe, at 13 he became a pupil of Marsick in Paris. He also studied with Ysaÿe. To keep himself he played in a café. Colonne heard him and offered him an orchestral desk. When the leader was ill he was given solos. His success was immediate so that "at twenty-two, Thibaud was the youngest violinist of great stature" (Flesch). In 1905 he formed the Cortot-Thibaud-Casals Trio. In the 1914-1918 war he fought at Ypres, on the Marne, at Arras and Verdun. In the second war he was engaged in intelligence work. He died in an air crash. Music was to distract from the miseries of life; his playing was virile, knowing neither vulgarity nor sentimentality.

VICTORIEN SARDOU (Paris 1831-Paris 1908) was the son of parents ruined by a frost which killed their olive trees, driving them to the capital seeking employment. They made no living and retired to the country leaving the boy to his own devices. When poverty made it impossible to complete a course in medicine he taught and wrote articles for an encyclopaedia. He tried his hand as a playwright, but poverty and many setbacks led to typhoid fever. Unexpectedly, he was nursed back to

health in his garret by a lady in the same house with theatrical connections. Now, adopting Eugène Scribe as a model, fortune smiled. Opera goers will remember him for *Fédora* (written for Sarah Bernhardt), *La Tosca* and *Madame Sans Gêne*. *Patrie* is founded on the rising of destitute Dutch at the end of the 16th century. His few records are of extreme rarity.

MARIE ROGER-MICLOS (Toulouse 1862-) gained first prizes for piano at the Conservatoires of Toulouse in 1872 and Paris, as a pupil of Mme. Massart, in 1877, in which year she made her début at the Concerts Colonne. At these concerts and those of Lamoureux and the Conservatoire she was highly acclaimed, as also when she toured America. Anton Rubinstein thought highly of her and for Ernst Pauer she was, “one of the most distinguished pianists of the present time”, but whilst Shaw admired her “swift, accurate, steely fingers”, he found her playing cold. In the violin department Fonotopia also had Kubelik and von Vecsey, but Roger-Miclos was the sole pianist. The sound quality is remarkably good.

EMMY DESTINN (Prague 1878-Ceské Budejovice 1930) took her name from her teacher Marie Loewe-Destinn and made her début in Berlin in *Cavalleria Rusticana* in 1898. She was immensely popular for many seasons in Berlin and London, but as a fervent Czech nationalist she was interned for part of the first world war. She was in the Berlin and Paris premières of *Salome*, but refused to take off the veils; she was a singer, not a dancer. She excelled in dramatic and spinto roles ranging from Mozart and Weber to Puccini and Smetana. (She soon dropped *Salome* as too heavy for her voice.) By all accounts her partnership with Caruso in *Aida* in Berlin must have been amongst the greatest operatic events ever heard. Her two Schubert Lieder in German were very unusual fare in Fonotopia’s catalogue.

THEODOR BERTRAM (Stuttgart 1869-Bayreuth 1907) was taught by his father; his parents were both singers. His début was in 1889 at Ulm, where he remained for two years before moving to Hamburg, and to Berlin in 1892. From 1893 to 1899 he sang in Munich. From 1899 to 1901 he was in America, principally at the Metropolitan Opera, and on his return he made his first appearance at Bayreuth. On his wife’s death in 1905, he took to drink and eventually committed suicide. He was a fine interpreter of Mozart and his Wotan was considered incomparable. Of the Fonotopia records made in Berlin those of Destinn, Grüning & Hoffmann appeared on the Fonotopia label, but those of Bertram only on Odeon.

FERNANDA CHIESA, soprano, CARLO ALBANI, tenor and LUIGI MANFRINI, bass. As with the postage stamp, a market for special issues grew. Thus for the centenary of Verdi’s birth a record was issued with a special label inscribed:

DISCO COMMEMORATIVO / OMAGGIO A VERDI / 1813 1913

For some listeners this version will have a vibrancy and drama compared with which the more famous recording by Caruso, Alda and Journet, magnificent though it is, is rather a tableaux.

The catalogue and matrix numbers, strangely with Odeon prefixes, reflect the dates.

Fonotipia artists on other Symposium Records include:

Ackté 1123, Adini 1172, Amato 1321, Anselmi 1170, Arkel 1248, Barrientos 1113, 1168, Bassi 1224, Bellantoni 1198, 1223, de Bohuss 1185, Bonci 1113, 1224, 1249, Borgatti 1199, Bréjean-Silver 1113, 1172, 1173, 1182, Burzio 1138, 1198, 1223, 1244, Calleja 1113, 1199, Cannetti 1138, 1158, 1315, Capoul, 1172, 1292, Carelli 1244, Caron 1172, Caprile 1249, 1315, Carrera 1315, Ciaroff-Cerini 1199, Clément 1189, Cornubert 1173, Delmas 1172, Dolci 1249, van Dÿck 1172, Escalaïs 1126, 1128, Frascani 1138, Gailhard 1172, 1292, Garbin 1113, 1199, 1249, Gilion 1199, Giraldoni 1168, Jerome 1182, Kinen 1182, Krismer 1249, Kruszelnicka 1248, Leliva 1185, Litvinne 1128, 1173, 1182, 1292, de Luca 1297, 1298, Maurel 1128, Mazzoleni 1113, 1244, 1249, Pacini, G. 1113, 1249, Perea, 1223, Marie de Reszke 1172, Russ 1113, 1249, 1315, Sammarco 1113, 1235, 1249, Scaremborg 1113, 1173, 1182, de Ségur 1223, Segura-Talien 1198, Seligman 1223, Stehle 1113, Storchio 1223, 1248, Stracciari, 1113, 1223, 1249, Verriotis 1248, Viglione-Borghese 1249, Vignas 1224, Zenatello 1138, 1148, 1158, 1168.

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