

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1268

The Great Tenors – Volume 1

George Bernard Shaw is said to have remarked that, “Tenors are a disease.” This album, however, is for the many opera goers who love singing and for whom the tenor voice is the most exciting of all. And besides the opportunity of hearing a range of excellent, but rarely heard voices, there is also the opportunity of sampling some rarely heard music.

VASILI DAMAEV (Moscow 1878-Moscow 1932) was first a cattle hand and then a church chorister. His voice excited attention and in 1902 he joined the singing class of the Moscow Philharmonic Society. His début in 1906 was as Dmitri (*Boris Godunov*) with the Zimin Private Opera in Moscow and by 1908 he was singing major roles in such works as *Carmen*, *A Life for the Czar*, *Pikova Dama* and *Sadko*. In 1908 he was in a much acclaimed Russian opera group in Paris, and in 1913 he was in London and Paris with Diaghilev’s company. As his career progressed he took on heavier roles such as Radames and Walther von Stolzing, and also appeared in concerts and recitals. After retiring in 1930 he taught and managed Moscow’s Aquarium Theatre.

AUGUSTO DIANNI (Rome 1873-Lwów 1938) gained experience in provincial Italian houses before appearing in Rome as Alfredo in 1899. In 1903 he sang Turiddu at Covent Garden. In 1903, also, he made a most successful tour of Poland and was engaged by the Lwów Opera. He made guest appearances in other Polish houses and sang at the Odessa Opera in 1905. He settled in Lwów and taught there after retiring from the stage in 1918. The repertoire for which he was particularly suited included *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *La Bohème*, *Don Pasquale*, *La Fille du Régiment*, *Rigoletto* and *La Traviata*.

EDOARDO FERRARI-FONTANA (Rome 1878-Toronto 1936) intended to follow his father as a doctor, but became instead a diplomat. He learned singing on his own and first appeared in operetta with an amateur company in South America. On his return to Italy in 1907 the baritone Riccardo Stracciari persuaded him to study formally in Milan. His operatic début was as no less than Tristan at Turin in 1909 under the baton of Tullio Serafin. He sang at first mainly in Italy and South America, then in North America. His repertoire included *Aïda*, *La Fanciulla del West*, *Norma*, *Otello*, *La Vestale* and *Die Walküre*, and in 1913 he created the part of Avito in *L’Amore dei tre Rè*, standing in for Bernardo de Muro at very short notice. He was one of the first Italian singers to attempt Wagner in German, though on this, his only and exceptionally rare Odeon disc, he was still using Italian. He was married to the contralto Margarethe Matzenauer and their daughter Adrienne sang in operetta. His New York début in 1914 (*L’Amore dei tre Rè*

under Toscanini) was greeted by the *New York Sun* as, ‘an electric shock through the Metropolitan.’ He seems to have retired in his early 40s.

PAUL FRANZ né François Gauthier (Paris 1876-Paris 1950) worked at first as a railway official. He was not accepted by the Conservatoire, so he studied privately under Louis Delaquerrière. In a singing competition in 1908 he won second prize. As so often happens in such events, the winner was never heard of again, but Franz was engaged by the Opéra for 1909 and he remained there until 1938. His début was as Lohengrin and his Wagner performances, which were a major part of his career, included the French première of Parsifal in 1914. Indeed, he remains France’s foremost Wagner tenor. He was in the premières of various minor French operas. To be noted, however, was the first complete performance at the Opéra of *Les Troyens* in which he sang Enée in 1921. Franz sang in the major French and Belgian houses. His José, Radames, Raoul, Roméo and Samson were very well received at Covent Garden in the years 1910 to 1914. Siegfried Wagner invited him to Bayreuth for the 1915 Festival, but the war prevented him going. From 1937 to 1945 he was a professor at the Conservatoire National.

MARIO GILION (Southern France 1870-Marseille 1914) probably sang first as a baritone. In 1901, however, he made his début at Monza as a tenor singing Vasco da Gama (*L’Africaine*). He went on to sing Arnaldo (*Guillaume Tell*) and Raoul (*Les Huguenots*) at Modena, both much applauded, both to become central in his repertoire. Also in 1901 he appeared at Budapest. In the following years he was at Bucharest, Genoa, Madrid, Turin and Venice. At Odessa he sang Manrico and Radames, at Warsaw he appeared in *Guillaume Tell* with Battistini. In 1907 he sang in Buenos Aires, probably his only American visit. In the season of 1910-1911 he sang these and other heavy roles, Jean (*Le Prophète*) for example, with great success at the Paris Opéra. His records, mostly uncommon, some rare, are all on the Fonotipia label.

DAVID CHRISTOPHOROVICH JUSHIN né Bindekos (1870-Moscow 1923) was born in Russia of Greek immigrants. He planned to take orders in the Russian Orthodox Church, but was persuaded by the singer, Dmitri Slavyanski that he had potential to sing. His application to a conservatory rejected, he attempted suicide. A Count Goncharov came to his aid and he was taught by Capelli, Leonova and Sefferi in St. Petersburg. After gaining experience at Charkov he sang at Odessa and St. Petersburg, and in 1901 he was engaged by the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. In 1908 he moved to the Zimin Private Opera, also in Moscow. He went back for a spell to St. Petersburg, and made a trip to Italy, after each occasion returning to Moscow. At various times, too, he toured Russia with his own companies. His principal roles were Alfredo, Canio, Eleazar, Enzo, Radames, Raoul and Roméo. He was married to the soprano Natalia Stepanovna Plugovskaya.

ANDREJ LABINSKI (Charkov 1871-Moscow 1941) sang in the chorus of St. Petersburg’s Marinski Theatre before studying with Stanislav Gabel at the

Conservatoire there. In 1897 he returned to the Marinski Theatre for his début. He was in the premières of two works by Rimsky-Korsakov: in 1902 in *Servilia* and in 1907 in *The Invisible City of Kitezh*. In 1911 he transferred to the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, remaining there until his retirement in 1924. He excelled in such roles as Czar Berendai (*Snow Maiden*-Rimsky-Korsakov), Faust, Don José, Lenski, Sinodal (*The Demon*-Rubinstein) and Sobinin (*A Life for the Czar*). In 1920 he became a professor of singing at the Moscow Conservatoire.

GIOVANNI MARTINELLI (Montagnana 1885 or ?1880-New York 1969) learned the clarinet as a child and thus was in the band for his military service. For a laugh his friends, noticing his voice, got him to sing behind a gramophone positioned in an open window of the barracks. On hearing this antic the officer in charge arranged for Martinelli to absent himself for lessons with Professor Mandolini in Milan. In 1910 at Milan he made his début in concert in Rossini's *Stabat Mater* and in opera in Verdi's *Ernani*. Puccini heard him and arranged for him to be in later performances of the first European staging of *La Fanciulla del West* at Rome and then Toscanini engaged him for the same work at Milan. By 1912 he was at Covent Garden and by 1913 at the Metropolitan Opera, where he sang in all but one season until 1945. On Caruso's death in 1921 the tenor roles were shared largely between Gigli and Martinelli. Gigli, undoubtedly, had the more sensuously beautiful voice, but his vocal mannerisms could be disturbing. Martinelli's sound, by contrast, had in it more steel and he was more the musician. After Gigli left, in 1932, Martinelli was New York's prime tenor until his retirement. His roles included Canio, Cavaradossi, Don Carlos, the Duke of Mantua, Eleazar, Lenski, Pinkerton and Rodolfo. As Otello, later in his career, he was a worthy successor to Tamagno and Zenatello. After 1945 he taught and occasionally he sang; much of his voice remaining to an astonishing age. Reproduced here are two early electric Edison Records, very rare for being issued just as Edison ceased production .

MODEST MENZINSKY (Novosilki, Galicia 1875-Stockholm 1935) was the son of a Russian Orthodox clergyman. After studying theology at the University of Lwów he studied singing first with Walery Wysocki in Lwów and then, from 1899 to 1903, with Julius Stockhausen in Frankfurt am Main, making his début there as Lionel in *Martha* in 1901. After gaining experience at Elberfeld and Nuremberg he moved to the Stockholm Opera in 1904 and to Cologne in 1910. He appeared in Schreker's *Die Gezeichneten*, *Der Schatzgräber* and *Irrelohe*. He was a guest at Covent Garden and in Dresden, Munich, Prague and Vienna. In 1926 he retired to Stockholm, teaching and giving occasional concerts. His roles included Canio, Eleazar, Florestan, Manrico, Otello, Radames, Samson and Siegfried. Menzinsky was originally a lyric tenor, but his few and uncommon records offer a brilliant heroic sound, and also a convincing actor.

GAETANO PINI-CORSI (Zadar 1865-Milan 1935) may have made his début as Ernesto in *Don Pasquale* at Empoli as early as 1881. After singing such roles as Almoviva, Manrico and the Duke of Mantua in smaller provincial houses, he

became better known for secondary roles at the main centres. Thus, for example, he was David in *Die Meistersinger* in 1898 at La Scala, the performance at which the Toscanini era began, and he was Mime in the first Italian *Siegfried*. These two parts remained central to his repertoire. He was Goro in both the unsuccessful and the successful premières of *Madama Butterfly*. His roles included Basilio (*Il Nozze di Figaro*), Dr. Caius (*Falstaff*), Loge (*Das Rheingold*) and Vašek (*The Bartered Bride*-Italian première). He is known to have been active at least until 1925. He was a brother of the baritone Antonio Pini-Corsi.

PETER RAITSCHEFF (Varna, Bulgaria 1887-Sofia 1960) began his studies under Umberto Mazetti in St. Petersburg and went on to further studies with Fernando De Lucia in Naples. From 1913 to 1920 he sang in Russia, chiefly at St. Petersburg. He then established himself in Western Europe, being particularly popular in Germany. In 1947 he returned to Varna to set up an opera company, at the same time teaching in Sofia. Although he retired from the stage in 1950, he still sang to cover for sick colleagues, appearing as Canio even at the age of 69. His most admired performances were as Canio, Hermann and Lenski.

ERIK SCHMEDES (Gentofte, near Copenhagen 1868-Vienna 1931) grew up in musical surroundings. One brother became a distinguished violinist, another, a fine Lieder singer. He himself studied piano in Copenhagen and in Berlin, where Pauline Viardot-Garcia offered to teach him singing. He studied further under Nikolaus Rothmühl in Berlin and Padilla y Ramos in Paris. In 1891 he made his début as a baritone, appearing at Wiesbaden and Nuremberg. In 1896 he went to Dresden, where the conductor, Ernst von Schuch advised him to retrain as a tenor with August Iffert. In 1898 he moved to Vienna, making his début there as Siegfried under Mahler in his new production without cuts. He remained in Vienna until his retirement in 1924, then staying on to teach. The many Viennese premières in which he took part included: *Es war Einmal* (Zemlinsky-1900), *Tiefland* (D'Albert-1908), *Der Musikant* (Bittner-1910), *Parsifal* (1914) and *Palestrina* (Pfitzner-1919). His roles at Bayreuth (1899, 1901, 1902, 1906) included Parsifal and Siegfried. He sang also in New York, Paris, Prague and many German houses. As recorded most prefer Slezak to Schmedes, but in Vienna at the time Schmedes was loved as a person and venerated as an actor and musician.

MANUEL UTOR The name of tenor Manuel Utor is not to be found in the standard Spanish operatic reference books although he did appear in an opera at the Teatro Liceo in Barcelona. He was born into a humble family in 1862 and grew up in the port area of Barcelona where he became a loader on the jetties where the fish was landed. He was widely known in Catalonia by his nickname 'El Musclaire', which is probably best translated as 'The Mussel Gatherer'. He was a jovial and popular character who entertained his colleagues and other customers in local cafes and canteens. He possessed an attractive and powerful, but completely untrained, voice and specialised in singing Catalan songs and excerpts from zarzuelas into which he interpolated

idiosyncratic effects.

He acquired a large following and those who thought Utor had the potential for greater things included a well-connected entrepreneur called Bernardo Janzen who persuaded 'El Musclaire' to live in his house and receive daily singing lessons. The plan was for him to appear in Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* at the Teatro Liceo. This was uphill work because the tenor had to learn both Italian words and a complex score with no previous experience of either. After a few months Utor was auditioned at the Teatro Liceo and rejected. Janzen organised a syndicate of Utor's admirers and hired the theatre for the evening of 25 January 1903. Wide publicity was given to this 'one-off' performance.

All went well during the first three acts and, in Act 4, Utor's 'O paradiso' was rapturously received. However, during the following love duet between Vasco de Gama and Selika, Utor lost his way. He began to improvise both music and words (with Catalan replacing Italian) so that the soprano was at a loss, the audience began to protest and the performance collapsed. That was Utor's first and last operatic appearance. He later appeared in zarzuela at such venues as Teatros Novedades and Tivoli; he was particularly appreciated in many performances of *Marina*, which was the high point of his career.

He returned to performing in restaurants and cafes for some time, but was soon forgotten. He died in poverty at Barcelona on 1 July 1946.

Utor's few records, which are very scarce, are keenly sought by collectors.

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