

THE GRAU RÉGIME AT THE METROPOLITAN

This is a very unusual Compact Disc. It is of recordings made at performances over a century ago. Collectors of records of great singers of the past, those interested in the development of operatic singing and students of the history of performing practice will all find its contents mouth-watering. Musically the contents are no more than fragments, but they are sung by some of the greatest artists of the age, in many instances artists who left no commercial records. Such singing can only be described as sensational. And there is, too, the frisson and the authenticity of 'live' performance. The disc also contains a degree of surface noise not encountered on any other product of Symposium Records; it is probably not a disc to be played straight through; it is certainly not intended for use as 'easy listening'. We believe, however, that it will repay careful, concentrated listening and study, for its fascinating insights into what we so loosely call the 'golden age of opera'. Of additional interest is the complex and fascinating history of the artifacts transferred to this Compact Disc.

Although the greatest singers are featured in this album, it can perhaps be considered as essentially a tribute to four people, only one of whom was a singer.

Operatic manager and impresario **Maurice Grau** (1849-1907) was very much part of the Golden Age, promoting opera and concerts alike. As early as 1873 he formed the English Opera Company with the singer Clara Kellogg. He was involved in the management of the Metropolitan Opera House for ten years. At first this was in association with Henry Abbey and John Schoeffel, but from 1898 until his retirement in 1903 he was sole General Manager. Amazingly, for four seasons (1897-1900) he also managed the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden. To both houses he bought a plethora of great singers. His retirement from the Metropolitan was marked on 27th April 1903 by an all-star gala, featuring many of the great artists he had bought to the house.

Lionel Mapleson (1865-1937) worked with opera companies for his entire adult life and for almost all of it he was Librarian of the Metropolitan Opera. He did appear once on the stage, but in a non-singing role. This was on 26th February 1933 at a gala to mark the silver jubilee of manager Gatti-Casazza.

William Seltsam (1897-1968) founded the International Record Collectors' Club in 1932. On its label he published this remarkable series of records on 78s and, later, on LPs.

Jean de Reszke (1850-1925) has become synonymous with the very notion of a golden age of opera. During the latter years of the nineteenth century, in London, New York and Paris he was regarded as the world's greatest tenor. Whatever foundation there is in the rumour that he was induced to make two commercial recordings, no trace of them has ever been found.

By 1900 the phonograph was slightly more than a toy, for the recording industry had hardly got under way. It seems that Lionel Mapleson acquired an Edison Home Phonograph with the quite specific intention of attempting to record the star singers at his own workplace. The early years of the Metropolitan were

beset by crises - managerial, artistic and financial. For a time it had become a 'German' opera house with all performances in that language. The régime launched by Abbey and consolidated by Grau established the Metropolitan as one of the great international opera houses, employing the world's finest singers in what was, by and large, the established repertory. Between 1891 and 1903 the roster of singers included Calvé, van Dyck, Lilli Lehmann, Maurel, Melba, the de Reszke brothers and van Rooy. Grau appears to have succeeded, perhaps uniquely, in the feat of making operatic management profitable. When he became sole manager he had few financial resources; on his death his estate was worth over \$600,000, a vast amount then. Allegedly, although it is hard to believe, this was all made at the height of his operatic activities over the period 1897-1903.

Mapleson made his recordings between 1901 and 1903. In the historical context, it needs to be born in mind that a quarter of a century elapsed before recordings made in an opera house were deemed suitable for commercial release. There seems little doubt that Mapleson shared with Grau, and, indeed, with record collectors of subsequent generations, a particular penchant for the great names. It will be shown that he made many attempts, mostly not very successful, to record Jean de Reszke. The rather scanty circumstantial evidence available suggests that the great man may not have been particularly enthusiastic.

Mapleson's activities came to an abrupt halt early in 1903. Did Mapleson simply lose interest or might there have been complaints from the artists, worried about extra equipment too near the stage? Some have speculated that Mapleson realized that in due course the leading operatic artists would be enticed into recording studios. Columbia launched its grand opera series in 1903, an American response to the growing celebrity catalogue of the Gramophone & Typewriter company in Europe, and Victor would soon follow. On the other hand by March 1903, the latest date of any known Mapleson cylinders, it is unlikely that he would actually have heard any celebrity records. An alternative, and, I think, more likely explanation might point to Grau's retirement at the end of the 1902-3 season. The new Director, the rather autocratic Heinrich Conried, may have been unwilling to allow Mapleson's extra-curricular activities to continue. Be all this as it may, what Mapleson could not have known at the time was that his would be the only known recordings of the voices not only of Jean de Reszke, but also of Georges Anthes, Lucienne Bréval, Emilio de Marchi, Luise Reuss-Belce, Albert Saleza, Thomas Salignac, Fritzi Scheff and Milka Ternina. Six of these were tenors, all of them older than Caruso, the dominant tenor at the Metropolitan from 1904 onwards. The Mapleson collection is particularly valuable for the knowledge it gives us of singing style in the pre-Caruso era. A parallel argument is relevant to the conductors of these excerpts and the arrival of Toscanini in 1908.

Although the cylinders disappeared from view, Mapleson kept many of them, and there were occasional mentions of the collection in published articles. An interesting book appeared in 1937, *Backstage at the Opera* by Rose Heilbut and Aime Gerber. The latter had joined the Metropolitan at the age of 14 around the turn of the century as an office boy to Maurice Grau; he was still at the house in 1937 with the title Paymaster. The book recalls Mapleson's recordings as "a wonderful lark" and recounts how the artists would head for his office the following day to hear the results. We learn that "the voices of Ternina, the de

Reszkes, Saleza, Nordica, and many others who made no (or few) public recordings were faithfully caught by Mapleson's wax cylinders". We read also that "these cylinders are still in existence".

By 1937 IRCC had built up an impressive catalogue including some records hitherto unpublished and many other rarities. In September that year it was able to issue for the first time re-recordings from commercial cylinders. Armed with introductions from Olive Fremstad and Geraldine Farrar, Seltsam had already been in contact with Mapleson and had received several cylinders from him. Although Mapleson died shortly thereafter, Seltsam was able to obtain the further cylinders from his son early in 1938. In November 1938 the then young record enthusiast Ira Glackens wrote a lengthy article in *The Gramophone* about the treasures which had emerged, and he gave pride of place to the cylinders of Jean de Reszke.

A careful reading of, and between the lines of, the regular monthly bulletins of the IRCC suggests that Seltsam almost certainly intended to start issuing the Mapleson cylinders in December 1937 commencing with recordings by Jean de Reszke. However, it was then announced that IRCC-110 was "temporarily postponed". Were IRCC's engineers encountering technical problems with the de Reszke recordings, perhaps because of the relative backwardness of the voice?

Eventually the series of Mapleson issues started in May 1939, not with de Reszke, but with Melba singing part of the Queen's aria from *Les Huguenots*. Only in January 1940 in Bulletin 90 do we read of, "The Return of Jean de Reszke" in fragments from *L'Africaine* and *Siegfried* on IRCC-110 with a printed recognition "that everyone's patience had been on trial for so long in the anticipation of the de Reszke recordings". It is a further indication of Seltsam's scholarly and scientific approach that the bulletin also included an assessment of the re-recordings from the leading critic, Oscar Thompson. He confessed to a fear that Jean de Reszke would have been "outraged if, in the days of his retirement, he could have suspected that these faint... sounds might come to be regarded in aftertime as in any way representative of him". (Interestingly the attributions of these two fragments to Melba and to de Reszke, respectively, have each been subsequently challenged).

IRCC issued its Mapleson re-recordings in three phases:

From 1939 to 1942 when war-time conditions brought activities to a temporary halt.

In the late '40s; a few 'new' items, and re-issues of a number of its own 'original' 78rpm discs.

Finally there were LPs.

Choices were clearly dictated by two factors: the historical importance of particular performances and the aural quality of the recordings. Collectors should acknowledge the care with which IRCC both sought to preserve and yet to make available the Mapleson legacy. The first 'IRCC Mapleson' were issued some forty years after the cylinders were cut. More than sixty years have elapsed since then, so that the original artifacts are now a century old. Each and every playing, and time itself have taken their tolls of the cylinders; wear, oxidation, shrinkage and micro-organisms. The contents of this CD are derived entirely from the earliest IRCC 78rpm issues, i.e. from the cylinders in their most original states. Indeed, this entire series of live performances in the initial 78rpm configuration fits so neatly on to one Compact Disc that one wonders whether Mapleson or Seltsam, or

perhaps Grau has smiled on the project. It is appropriate to repeat the words of an IRCC Bulletin, “they are not comparable to high or higher fidelity recordings of our present age or even to the earliest acoustical recordings made in the studios, but WE AT LAST HAVE THE VOICE OF JEAN DE RESZKE”. Years later, when much of the material had been transferred to LP, IRCC actually went a little further: the recordings were “neither LOW nor HIGH fidelity”.

It is in every way appropriate to start with Melba and *Les Huguenots*. It was the earliest cylinder from an opera performance to be offered by IRCC and also the club’s first Mapleson issue. In a very real sense ‘grand opera’ can be said to have originated in Paris in the early part of the 19th century, and *Les Huguenots* was perhaps its ultimate manifestation. I have already alluded to the concept of a ‘golden age’ of opera at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Performances of *Les Huguenots* at the Metropolitan seem almost synonymous with grand opera and the art of singing in that golden age. Maurice Grau stuck to his principle; there were seven important roles in *Les Huguenots*, these would be the nights of seven stars. On 11th March 1901 the cast included Melba, the de Reszke brothers, Journet, Scotti, Homer and Nordica. Melba’s singing is, simply put, stunning, the impact it had on Seltsam and his associates is not surprising. Melba enjoyed a forty year career in opera. She sang regularly at the Metropolitan from 1893 to 1905, but then she joined Hammerstein’s Manhattan Company. More than half of her 236 performances with the Metropolitan were in four operas, all offering scope for coloratura: *Faust*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Les Huguenots*. Gradually she became the supreme lyric soprano, but in some of her early commercial records, of 1904, we still hear the vocal fireworks of the Mapleson cylinder.

Interestingly, more than thirty years after the first IRCC release the attribution to Melba was challenged. A leading authority on the Mapleson cylinders, the late Dr. John Stratton argued that the recording was in reality made on a different occasion and that the singer was Suzanne Adams. Dr. Stratton drew on a rich variety of evidence to support his contention, but personally I am not persuaded. Commercial records hardly suggest that these brilliant high notes, projected with such astonishing technical facility, could have emanated from the throat of Adams. The contemporary assessment of Blanche Marchesi, herself a professional singer, her mother taught her, Adams and Melba, cannot be ignored, “her voice always struck me as exclusively pure and quite specially religious...but she never rose to be a star of the first magnitude”. Part of the argument for Adams is based on language. The fragment is seemingly in French and, allegedly, the performance on 11th March 1901 was in Italian (extant cylinders by Nordica and Jean de Reszke are in that language). However, we need to recall that in this so-called golden age different languages were used in the same performance. Mapleson himself, wrote in *The Strand Musical Magazine* that, “The suggeritore (prompter) has a very responsible post... several of the operas have been published with different librettos, especially the works of Meyerbeer, and it is quite a usual matter for the suggeritore to have three different editions of *Les Huguenots*...before him...in order to accommodate the artists who have been in the habit of singing the various editions (and)...there is also the difference of language

to provide for. It is quite an ordinary matter to hear Faust, Marguerite and Mephistopheles sing the French version, whilst Valentino and Siebel are only acquainted with the Italian libretto". Mapleson must have known, he was the house librarian. An interesting footnote in the official *Metropolitan Opera Annals*, reads that during the 1900-01 season *Les Huguenots* was "presented both in Italian and in French" and that "on occasion some artists may have chosen to deviate from the specified language". To quote Michael Aspinall, "it seems obvious that Nordica only knew the role of Valentine in Italian, and Melba that of Marguerite in French, whereas Jean could sing Raoul in either tongue, switching from one to another to accommodate whichever diva he was duetting with."

However, undoubtedly the discussion will continue.

Throughout the 1890s de Reszke was a mainstay of the house; his Metropolitan career amounted to 340 performances of 17 roles. All of these were in French and German repertoire. It is worth bearing in mind that although Jean was regarded as 'the' tenor in London, Paris and New York he hardly performed in the Latin countries. W.J. Henderson had no doubt that he was "the greatest male singer of our time." Reviewing a performance of *Lohengrin* in his final season, he commented on "the delicious beauty of tone and that consummate mastery of phrase." George Bernard Shaw, a fine, if iconoclastic critic, was clearly a great admirer of Jean's singing, but was scathing about his acting, "except in a character like Romeo, which proceeds on the simplest romantic lines, he creates very little dramatic illusion."

Mapleson and Jean de Reszke were present together at the Metropolitan only for the season of 1900-1901. Mapleson, to judge by the surviving cylinders, sought, as a priority, to capture the voice of Jean de Reszke; no other singer was recorded with anything like the same frequency. It is tempting to believe that Mapleson had in mind something rather more than home entertainment. Seven cylinders, from *Tristan und Isolde*, *L'Africaine* and *Lohengrin*, were issued in 78rpm format by IRCC. This seems to suggest that Seltsam shared Mapleson's priorities. Apart from the Melba item, all the cylinders from 1900-01 issued on 78rpm were supposedly of Jean de Reszke. They include duets with two great dramatic sopranos, neither of whom made any commercial recordings, the Swiss born, but naturalized-French, Lucienne Bréval, and the great Croatian Milka Ternina. However, the recordings made by Mapleson during this season were especially backward, so that making acceptable transfers has always been particularly difficult.

I wrote "supposedly" a few lines back because I think it is reasonable to assume that the sword on IRCC-110 is in fact being forged by Andreas Dippel. The voice certainly does not sound much like that of de Reszke heard on other Mapleson recordings. The only feasible means of identification of "home made" wax cylinders was by slips of paper in their boxes; the possibility of misattributions is obvious.

Lucienne Bréval sang for only two seasons at the Met, but from 1892 to 1919 she had a big following at the Opéra in Paris. Her very first performance, at the Opéra, was in the role of Selika in *L'Africaine*, bizarrely followed by that of Jemmy in *Guillaume Tell*. "What can one say?" asks her 1908 biographer, Georges Pioch. Certainly in a photograph she does not look at all like a boy. She gave 26

performances at the Metropolitan between in 1900 and 1901, the bulk of which were in French repertoire, nine in *Les Huguenots*, eight in *Le Cid* and just two in *L'Africaine*. Given the extensive activities of the French recording industry during those years it seems almost inconceivable that there are no commercial records.

Milka Ternina made her professional début in Zagreb in 1882. Her four Met seasons from 1899 to 1904, when she took on a series of major dramatic roles, especially in Wagner's operas, were towards the end of an important international career. Much later she taught Zinka Milanov who was to enjoy a lengthy and highly successful career at the Met.

The two fragments from the great love duet in *Tristan und Isolde* featuring Ternina and de Reszke are a tantalizing indication of what might have been. They may have been perhaps the greatest interpreters of the music, but, alas, they are virtually inaudible through the heavy surface noise. The four fragments from *L'Africaine*, in two of which the great tenor is joined by Bréval, are much more satisfactory. Jean de Reszke's voice is rich and burnished. To my ears the sound is not dissimilar to that of Jacques Urlus in a later generation. Bréval's voice seems almost to slice through the considerable surface noise; this is visceral singing. Ternina is once again less fortunate in the fragment from *Tosca* recorded the following year; the orchestra and the surface noise jointly drown out most of her voice until her rather shrill screams at the end. Although *Tosca* was her most frequent single role at the Metropolitan, no less than 83 of her 126 performances there were in Wagnerian roles. When Blanche Marchesi visited Bayreuth she mentioned to Cosima Wagner that Ternina had assumed the role of *Tosca*. There was a chilling response, "I am profoundly wounded, astonished and amazed that Madame Ternina lowers herself to sing music of such an unknown man". Had she read Henry Krehbiel's review of Ternina's first American *Tosca*? "What needs to be said after a record of amazement at the tragic power disclosed by Miss Ternina, which in its most hideous moments has had no companion on the local operatic stage since Mme. Calvé created nightmares with her impersonation of *La Navarraise*, may be left for another time".

The final cylinder from the 1900-1 season, the last with Jean de Reszke, introduces his brother Édouard, albeit somewhat tenuously. Again there is that burnished quality to Jean's singing and there are some thrilling notes towards the end of the record. The very little Édouard has to sing is virtually inaudible, but he was still on the Metropolitan roster the following season when Mapleson's efforts to record him were much more successful.

The 'heroine' of Mapleson's second recording season (1901-02) is undoubtedly Emma Calvé who is featured on four of the cylinders re-recorded by IRCC. Although she made many commercial recordings, the Mapleson cylinders add a major extra dimension to our knowledge of her art. When she first appeared at the Met in 1893 Henderson commented, "her *Carmen* is a creature of unbridled passion, graceful with a sensuous, suggestive grace... Mme. Calvé carried out her conception of the part with the same theatrical ability she has shown in her *Santuzza*." Krehbiel went a little further, "(her) impersonation of the character is certainly as frank an exposition as the most ardent lover of realism could wish. In some respects it is best to leave her performance to the imagination." Reading such reviews makes clear just how much imagination is needed when we listen to her

commercial records which, all too often, simply fail to convey the essential vitality apparent to all who heard her on stage. The Mapleson fragments are different; the Jewel song rightly brings down the house and she effortlessly dominates the finale of *Faust*. In *Cavalleria Rusticana* we meet a Santuzza with whose passions it might be wiser not to trifle. Emilio de Marchi, another tenor who made no commercial recordings, is virtually swept away in the excitement.

Two other tenors feature on the 1901-02 cylinders; Albert Alvarez and Andreas Dippel. The former enjoyed a considerable career in Paris and seems to have been both well received and well paid during his four Met seasons. The burnished quality of his voice, which we can also hear on Pathé, sound not unreminiscent of Jean de Reszke whom he succeeded in the role of Rodrigue in *Le Cid*, an opera which thereafter disappeared from the Met repertory. Dippel was a highly versatile tenor who gave nearly four hundred performances in forty-four different roles at the Met. When Conried announced his retirement as Director, there was a move to appoint Dippel rather than Gatti-Casazza to succeed. Yet another who made few commercial recordings, his is a big, full-throated tenor – exciting, if not especially subtle.

De Marchi was still at the Met the following season when Mapleson captured him with Eames and Scotti in fragments from *Tosca*. These are amongst the most forward and exciting of the Mapleson cylinders. De Marchi had created the part of Cavaradossi, much to the disappointment of Caruso. Until hearing the Mapleson fragment I had accepted rather unquestioningly the assumption that Puccini had simply made a mistake, perhaps indeed succumbing to pressure from the very first *Tosca*, Hariclea Darclée, who was having an affair with de Marchi. It is, however, worth remembering that much of *Tosca* is pure verismo. I wonder if Caruso ever indulged in the vocal histrionics, at which de Marchi is evidently quite superb. Eames has sometimes been described as a ‘cold’ singer, clearly inappropriate on the basis of this *Tosca*. Here she is as passionate as any, and a much finer singer than most. In the finale she is a great deal more audible than Ternina. The excitement is, again, visceral, and we feel a little cheated when the cylinder abruptly cuts off. Scotti’s Scarpia is suave and oily in turn, the projection incredible. There must be praise, too, for Luigi Mancinelli, who drives the performance with incredible panache. I feel he is the finest conductor heard in this collection.

The majority of cylinders reproduced onto 78 rpm discs by IRCC are from Mapleson’s ‘final’ season, that of 1902-03, and there is little doubt that two dramatic sopranos dominate, Lillian Nordica and Johanna Gadski.

Our first hand knowledge of Nordica is based on her Columbia records. The best of them justify her enormous contemporary reputation, but they form on the whole a somewhat disappointing legacy. It was clearly a huge voice, and absolutely right for the big Wagnerian roles, a combination likely to cause problems in the early days of commercial recording. No such inhibitions affected Mapleson, he catches Nordica ‘in full flight’ in the greatest of her roles. The singing sounds effortless; it is a voice of incredible power; the overall impression is almost godlike. Every note of Brünnhilde’s war cry in the short piece from *Die Walküre* is delivered with supreme confidence, even bravura. It is appropriate to use the word ‘visceral’ yet again of the various excerpts from the Immolation scene

at the end of *Die Götterdämmerung*. The fragments of the love scene and the finale of *Tristan und Isolde* are beautifully etched and we can be grateful to the conductor, Alfred Hertz for his careful, slow tempo. As with all the other cylinders there is considerable background noise, but the sheer verve and majesty of Nordica's singing overcomes all. We can indeed share with Henry Krehbiel his wonderment at "how Mme. Nordica rose to the opportunity which Wagner's drama opened to her. The greater the demand, the larger her capacity." One senses also that Nordica inspired her partners, on these cylinders chiefly Georges Anthes. He was based in Dresden and Budapest for most of his career; there were only two seasons at the Met. During these he mostly sang Wagnerian roles. Anthes is another who made no commercial recordings, he reveals a somewhat more mellifluous voice than does Dippel. He is a powerful and vivid Lohengrin in the duet with Gadski, one of the cleanest and clearest of all the cylinders.

Nordica gave nearly four hundred performances with the Met between 1891 and 1909. The sheer strength of the company is demonstrated by the presence from 1898 onwards of another superb dramatic soprano, Johanna Gadski. She stayed until 1917 giving nearly five hundred performances in twenty-nine different roles. In her case there is a substantial and very fine legacy of commercial recordings, we might think it even unnecessary to turn to the Mapleson legacy for the 'real Gadski'. However, the series of fragments from the duet between Valentine and Marcel from *Les Huguenots* in which Gadski is joined by Édouard de Reszke stands quite apart from anything else of her recordings. It is also worth bearing in mind that this work was then part of the core repertory of the house, the performance on 24th January 1903 being the 108th since its inauguration in October 1883.

Not only did Édouard continue to sing at the Met for two years after Jean left, but he also sang much more frequently, in all he appeared 679 times with the company. The gruff Protestant warrior, Marcel was his most frequent role, with 81 performances. Given that he also sang the part in London and Paris he must certainly have been the most experienced Marcel in relatively modern times. In view of his reputation Édouard de Reszke's three commercial records are somewhat disappointing. The Mapleson fragments from *Les Huguenots* show him in an altogether better light; the characterization seems absolutely right and what must be then have been an incipient hoarseness is somehow appropriate to the role. He is in any event an excellent foil for an impulsive Gadski; who seems ideal as Valentine and quite sings her heart out. It is of interest that Nordica was the reigning Valentine, she sang the part far more frequently than Gadski.

For whatever reason, reviews of Gadski's performances were fairly varied. After his first season, Conried did not renew her contract and she was absent from the Metropolitan for two seasons. Richard Aldrich, one of the finest contemporary American critics, welcomed a New York concert appearance during the interval, even though "the bare platform of Carnegie Hall, with only the impotent accompaniment of a pianoforte, did not afford the right place nor the right manner to vindicate her prowess as the Brünnhilde of *Götterdämmerung*." Aldrich described her as "first of all a singer in the real sense of the word; an uncommonly beautiful voice, in which the evidences of full control and skillful use are rarely lacking."

The opera in which Gadski appeared the most frequently at the Metropolitan was *Die Walküre*, in which she gave 45 performances as Brünnhilde and 29 as Sieglinde. On February 21st 1903 she was Sieglinde to Nordica's Brünnhilde. Given that the cast also included Bispham and Schumann-Heink, it was clearly another Grau night of all the stars. Little can be heard of either Nordica or Bispham in the passage marked 'Herrlichste Maid!', but Gadski sings rapturously as she foretells the birth of Siegfried. There is an interesting demonstration of Gadski's versatility on the very last track of the album, a short lyrical piece from *Ero e Leandro*. This is one of the earliest examples not only of a composer conducting his own work, but also of a première conductor of a work.

I don't think we learn a lot more about Gadski from the two *Lohengrin* excerpts; indeed it may be appropriate to focus more attention on her partners. George Anthes has been mentioned. Luise Reuss-Belce enjoyed a long and distinguished career, mostly in Germany. During her only two seasons at the Metropolitan, she sang Wagner almost exclusively. She comes over as a determined and fearsome Ortrud. It is a fine piece of singing and almost all we are ever likely to hear of this singer; she almost certainly made commercial records, but they were not released. A number of other singers are featured in the Wagner excerpts, but only Bispham is given what could be called a 'solo'. The few bars from Wotan's Farewell to Brünnhilde suggest a huge, even cavernous, voice, far more powerful and theatrical than on many of his commercial records, which I have often found to be slightly disappointing. The orchestra under Alfred Hertz plays superbly; in modern parlance it is closely miked. Yet Bispham's voice rings out majestically. Hertz's Metropolitan career, which began in 1902 when he was thirty, mounted to 765 performances in 13 consecutive seasons.

The presence of Eames, Nordica and Gadski in the company might have been enough of soprano riches for most impresarios, but Grau also had Marcella Sembrich. Hers was one of the truly great lyric soprano voices, and with a fine coloratura. She was a perennial favorite with the Metropolitan giving 467 performances spread over a period of more than twenty five years from her début there at the second performance in the house. According to W.J. Henderson, "no singer ever won the recognition of a New York audience more easily." Fifteen years later the same critic noted that "the voice has not lost its beauty, while the singer's art has reached its maturity". *La Fille du Régiment* entered the Metropolitan repertoire in January 1902, presumably as a new vehicle for Sembrich. For Henry Krehbiel the performance added lustre to a brilliant vocalist, it was one of the "triumphs of her American career." We can understand the enthusiasm when we listen to this pair of cylinders. There is brilliant singing with lovely roulades. Alas, there is all too little, but the cylinders are also memorable for excellent ensemble singing, and the incisive conducting of Philippe Flon. His Metropolitan career coincided exactly with Mapleson's recording activities. Sembrich left a substantial number of commercial recordings, to which these are valuable additions.

The first of them includes an exciting glimpse of yet another tenor of whom there are no commercial recordings, Thomas Salignac. His career extended from singing to directing, publishing, writing and teaching. In six seasons with the Metropolitan Opera he gave more than 250 performances mainly in French and

Italian repertoire. His contribution to the first excerpt from *La Fille du Régiment* reveals another rich, burnished voice somewhat in the mould of Jean de Reszke. He also sings the single word 'Marguérite' in *Faust*. His partner is the Viennese Fritzi Scheff. She offers an appropriate point at which to draw these notes to a conclusion. Scheff was not a great singer. In a short career at the Metropolitan, she appeared 141 times in lighter roles. Perhaps the best description might be 'soubrette', and she did indeed concentrate later on operetta. However, her passionate singing of 'Il t'aime', Marguérite's apostrophe to love at the end of the garden scene, is absolutely superb. She only sang this part three times with the Metropolitan. It was the preserve of Calvé and Melba, but it was also performed also by Adams, Nordica and Sembrich, all of whom ranked higher in the singing firmament than Scheff.

Comparisons may be odious, but they can also be instructive. In this, the Golden Age of singing, Fritzi Scheff was never more than a minor figure at the Metropolitan, yet the aural evidence is that she could turn in a performance to rank with the greatest. There is, therefore, a sense in which this one cylinder of itself adds a dimension to our knowledge of Grau's achievements. A further dimension is indicated by one other example, the concerted number 'Su del Nilo' from *Aïda*. It is difficult to identify the separate voices save for that of Louise Homer's Amneris which rises, appropriately, above all the others. Once again the conductor is Mancinelli. At the end of a ten year Metropolitan stint, during which he conducted on more than five hundred occasions, this cylinder is the supreme demonstration of what was surely the finest orchestra playing regularly in any opera house at the time. The élan and brio are superb and, as the cylinder ends one experiences a real yearning to hear more. Surely a suitable epitaph for Grau, Mapleson and the Metropolitan of the Golden Age.

Stanley Henig

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