

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1306

RARE & UNIQUE EARLY CYLINDERS 1900~1903

There is a tendency amongst many collectors to regard cylinders as of less significance than discs. This is perhaps engendered by absence of facilities for playing them. What we loosely call the 'gramophone' was the major access to recorded music for more than eighty years. During that time there were huge technological improvements for domestic users, but these were not paralleled for machines to play cylinders. However, the true aural quality of most early cylinder recordings is certainly not inferior to that of the earliest discs. Perhaps this needs to be slightly qualified with regard to the material in this album. These cylinders were all made at the very dawn of commercial recording, indeed some of them pre-date that dawn. Apart from intrinsic rarity, their importance rests on the reputations of the singers and interest in the era in which they were active. The only recordings by Aramburo and Faure, and most of those of Lassalle are on cylinders. All three had important operatic careers in the nineteenth century and are amongst the earliest singers to record. The names and recordings of Caruso, Chaliapin and Litvinne have a wider currency. However, their early cylinder recordings add to our knowledge of their art.

Several of the artists have appeared previously on Symposium Compact Discs, and their careers are discussed in the accompanying booklets. (Catalogue numbers are in an appendix.) Accordingly, this note focuses particularly on artists new to the series, especially Aramburo. His cylinders, of those known to have survived most are included in this album, were only recently discovered, and much less is known and has been published about his career than is the case with most of the other artists featured.

Spanish born, ANTONIO ARAMBURO (1838-1912) was almost certainly the very first 'tenore robusto' to make recordings. For late nineteenth century opera-goers this was a relatively new kind of voice of which Enrico Tamberlik was perhaps the first great exponent. It lends particular historic significance to these recordings even though they were made in 1901, when Aramburo's operatic career was over and he had also virtually retired from the concert platform. Aramburo's operatic career extended from 1871 to 1896, a quarter century particularly noteworthy for first rate sopranos, indeed the great critic Herman Klein devoted a whole book to them. The careers of Lilli Lehmann and Adelina Patti covered the entire quarter century. Ilma de Murska, Pauline Lucca, Christine Nilsson and Therese Tietjens were amongst the great names of the early seventies; Emma Calvé, Nellie Melba, Lillian Nordica and Marcella Sembrich their equivalents by the mid-'90s. It would not be possible to list a contemporary 'top ten' group of tenors of like stature. Jean de Reszke, Julian Gayarre, Fernando De Lucia and Francesco Tamagno were certainly at the very apex of the singing profession, but others do not come to mind.

London opera-goers were able to hear Aramburo only in 1873, very early in his career. We may surmise that the impresario Mapleson was struggling to find first class tenors to match the sopranos at his disposal. The previous season the

tenor scheduled to sing Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte* was taken ill when the company was on tour at Newcastle. Contralto Zelia Trebelli took over the role. According to her biographer, Marie de Mensiaux “she made such an impression that some of the critics suggested that *in the present scarcity of tenors* (she) should give up contralto parts”. Mapleson’s season in 1873 opened with *Lucrezia Borgia*, the cast included Tietjens and Trebelli with Mongini in the tenor part of Gennaro. *Musical World* appraised the company: as well as Tietjens, Mapleson could boast of Nilsson and di Murska, Clara Kellogg and Marie Roze. A laconic comment followed, “The department on the other side is, in its way, also strong, including Signors Campanini, Fancelli etc. among the tenors, in addition to Signor Antonio Aramburo, about whom there has been a lot of talk.” Perhaps most of the talk was by the irrepressible Mapleson. His advance notice describes Aramburo as being “from the leading theatres of Milan, Rome, Barcelona, Messina etc.” Interestingly, the chronology by Tom Kaufman lists no previous appearances in Rome or Messina, whilst his performances in Milan were at the Teatro dal Verme and not La Scala. His London début in *La Favorita*, opposite Tietjens, was the first occasion when he appeared with any major singer

The tenore robusto was unknown in the early part of the nineteenth century, and even in the 1870s the voice remained a rarity. Thus it may not be unreasonable to describe Aramburo as being historically important, but this does not in itself justify the eulogies bestowed on him as a result of the discovery of his cylinders and the reconstruction of his career. Allowances are due for recordings made so late in a career, but the evidence of reviews and contemporary critics suggests that Aramburo, Campanini, Fancelli and Mongini were in no way equal partners for the reigning sopranos. ‘Spin doctoring’ was probably at that time more typical of operatic management than of government; prospectus and reality were by no means identical. Aramburo was announced for *Mignon*, *Rigoletto*, *Un Ballo in Maschera* and *La Traviata*. Whether or not these operas were performed in the London season or even on the subsequent tour, Aramburo, it would seem, appeared in none of them. On the other hand the prospectus makes no mention of *Il Trovatore* or *Norma*; two of the three operas in which Aramburo did appear in London. *La Favorita* was the third and its performance merited a lengthy review in *Musical World*, “That (Aramburo) possesses a legitimate tenor voice, of power and good quality, is undeniable; but about his ability to employ it advantageously there was no fair opportunity of judging until the last scene... ‘Spirto gentil’ was sung with true feeling, called for again and repeated. As an actor, Signor Aramburo is at present not remarkable... his great scene with Alphonso XI... went for nothing, so impassive and undramatic is Signor Aramburo.” Before leaving Mapleson’s 1873 season, it is worth stressing that of all the singers Aramburo is the only one known to have left records. Of artists engaged for Gye’s rival Covent Garden season that year, five were subsequently recorded: Albani, Patti, Cotogni, Faure (accepting the attribution) and Maurel. Each was certainly more important in the operatic firmament than Aramburo, but none was a tenor.

These British performances were early in Aramburo’s career which continued for another two decades. The chronology suggests concentration on a limited number of roles, particularly in operas by Verdi and Donizetti. We catch glimpses through contemporary reviews. He appeared at the Théâtre Italien in

Paris in the winter of 1876-7 initially in the local première of *La Forza del Destino*, and was, according to the annals of Noël and Stoulig, “one of the most remarkable Italian (sic) tenors – apart from some nasality, a magnificent organ.” This assessment seems to have been slightly modified by the time Aramburo sang Manrico in *Il Trovatore*, then there was praise for the upper register, but some criticism of the middle range. His contributions to three other operas passed virtually without notice in the annals.

Aramburo’s appearances in North America were all in the late autumn of 1879, again under Mapleson’s aegis, but now with Campanini in the company. According to Mapleson there was a “kind of operatic duel” between the two tenors. Aramburo had “quite conquered New York”, indeed “being a Spaniard, his own countrymen supported him nightly.” However he was displeased by some hissing and adverse press comment. What actually happened is open to conjecture. According to Mapleson, Aramburo borrowed money from him and simply disappeared back to Europe. George Odell in his mammoth *Annals of the New York Stage* refers to Mapleson’s ability “to freeze from his payroll singers who failed to attract”, and adds slightly that Aramburo “modestly set himself down as one of the six leading tenors in Europe.” What is fact is that Aramburo left the United States precipitately, returning to Europe to fulfill a contract at La Scala where he appeared in *Aïda* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. A note in the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* describes Aramburo’s voice as ‘splendid’. Pompeo de Cambiasi’s early *Annals of La Scala* sought to sum up each presentation in one word, apparently *Aïda* was ‘buono’, ‘good’ and *Lucia* ‘cattivo’, ‘awful’.

Locating reviews of Aramburo’s performances is not easy. Examining some specialist music journals in countries where he performed suggests that his impact may have been limited. Often there is little more than the briefest mention. Aramburo sang in many houses in many countries without any obvious home base. This was not that unusual, but some significance should be attached to the fact that he was rarely invited back. Perhaps the opera going public did not really warm to this new kind of tenor. What we hear on record is certainly powerful singing with ringing high notes. That said, there is a certain coarseness; one can imagine the opera public wanting to hear the new kind of voice, but not unhappy to return to more stylish tenor singing.

If ‘top’ tenors were in relatively short supply in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the era could boast a plethora of fine baritones, a situation lasting into the early twentieth century. A splendid book by leading critic Henri de Curzon published in 1898 and entitled *Croquis d’Artistes* studies the life and careers of sixteen great French singers. On the baritone side he includes Faure, Lasalle, Maurel and Renaud. All four were recorded, thus Maurel and Renaud can be heard earlier in the Symposium series. The availability of cylinders of Faure and Lasalle offers insight into the art of the French baritone, dating back to 1852 when Faure began his career at the Opéra Comique in Paris. Lassalle, in many ways his successor, was to sing his own final performance at the Paris Opéra in 1894.

JEAN-BAPTISTE FAURE (1830-1914) was the leading baritone at the Opéra Comique for seven years, creating roles in eight new works. The most important was Meyerbeer’s *Le Pardon de Ploërmel (Dinorah)*, regularly performed

at the Opéra Comique before 1914, but thereafter joining the other seven in obscurity. The same could be said for five of the eight creations at the Paris Opéra which he joined in 1861; the exceptions were *L'Africaine*, *Don Carlos* (in the original five act French version) and *Hamlet*, in which he created the title rôle opposite the Ophélie of Christine Nilsson. Faure also enjoyed a major international career. He sang regularly at Covent Garden between 1860 and 1876, appearing in the major works of the baritone repertoire. Much later de Curzon devoted an entire book to Faure. The sub-title, *Une gloire française de l'art lyrique* says it all. Rather more accessible is a recent biographical article by Paul Lewis in volume 35 of *The Record Collector*. The provenance of the two cylinders attributed to Faure is analyzed. Compelling proof is lacking, but we are certainly listening to an elderly artist of great distinction and refinement, and no feasible alternative suggests itself. Faure first sang Alphonse in *La Favorita* in London in 1860, repeating the role the following year at the Paris Opéra where it had been created in 1840. Though not a creator record, it somehow conveys the impression that it might almost have been. Amongst the ranks of truly great opera singers Faure must be counted the 'oldest' (earliest born) to have left recordings.

JEAN-LOUIS LASSALLE (1847-1909) made his début in Liège in *Les Huguenots* in 1868. He first sang at the Paris Opéra in 1872 when Faure was 'on international duty'. He, too, created a considerable number of rôles in operas now largely forgotten, an exception being *Samson et Dalila* in which he sang the High Priest. Herman Klein offers an interesting comparison, "Lassalle's voice was bigger than Faure's and the quality of his tone even more sympathetic; of the two, however, Faure was the greater as well as the more versatile artist. In the rôle of Nelusko (*L'Africaine*) there was little to choose between them; both were simply superb. The superiority of Faure asserted itself mainly in those basso cantante rôles for the tessitura of which his deeper organ was better adapted."

Lassalle sang regularly at Covent Garden between 1887 and 1893. George Bernard Shaw clearly liked Lassalle, but not his Rigoletto. His analysis makes interesting reading for those who assume that Wagner put extra demands on the voice, "We are entitled to expect that he (Lassalle) shall in future either sing the part as Verdi wrote it, or else let it alone. At the same time... the composer has only himself to thank when the same artist, who sings the much longer part of Wagner's Hans Sachs without turning a hair, flatly declines to submit to the strain of Rigoletto." Lassalle also sang with the Metropolitan Opera, in three seasons he appeared 125 times in thirteen rôles. Did overwork contribute to a relatively early retirement? His cylinder recordings made in 1902 and 1903 offer some very fine and refined singing but the voice sounds somewhat tired.

The recordings of FÉLIA LITVINNE (1860-1936), one of the truly great sopranos, have been re-issued extensively in the Symposium series. The booklets offer details of a career which began in 1883, when she appeared at short notice in *Simone Boccanegra* at the Théâtre-Italien in Paris. She was starting as she continued, at the very top, for in the cast were two of the creators of Verdi's revised 1881 version, Victor Maurel and Édouard de Reszke. Litvinne appreciated the importance of her records. In her memoirs, written in retirement, there is a moving comment, "My voice, so beautiful and so warm, is practically gone. I have some

very fine gramophone records. I always say in connection with the gramophone, 'there rests Félicia Litvinne.'"

FEODOR CHALIAPIN (1873-1938) was one of the most prolific recording artists of the '78' era. His first records were made in Moscow by the Gramophone and Typewriter Company in 1902, his last, for Victor, were made in Tokyo in 1936. Many of the records sold in vast numbers. The privately made cylinders reproduced on this CD pre-date the first G&T recording session, perhaps by as much as three years. Their main point of distinction is the relative youthfulness of the voice; the timbre and vocalization were to change surprisingly little over the next three and a half decades. Much has been written about all aspects of Chaliapin's life and career, and there have been detailed analyses of his recordings. Serge Levik devotes a whole chapter to Chaliapin in his *Memoirs*, and I doubt if there has ever been a more perceptive analysis: *Chaliapin was born a singer of genius... His genius was, if one can put it like this, in his 'vocal' soul, in his vocal timbres, in which there were colours richer than the rainbow... A basso cantante of an even, velvety timbre with rather weak low notes and free top ones... With its insubstantial, rather unusual, slightly 'hoarse' low notes, Chaliapin's voice, starting from the low E flat of the middle octave, went up full of 'body' right to the top, full-bodied in the ranges of the bass tessitura... His voice wasn't stentorian, but it was large, very carrying and had sufficient power to cut through any orchestra... The majority of Chaliapin's contemporaries were under his influence to some degree or other. Many tried to imitate him but soon learned that it was impossible.* Perhaps it is that very last sentence which summarizes Chaliapin's centrality in the history of opera and recording; hugely influential and inimitable, and as such a central, immediately recognizable voice.

The oldest and least known singer in this album is PETER SCHRAM (1819-95). He enjoyed a very lengthy operatic career, almost exclusively in Copenhagen. According to Kutsch and Riemens (*Unvergängliche Stimmen*, later editions) his very last appearance was as Leporello in *Don Giovanni* in 1889. Shortly afterwards he seems to have made this recording privately on a prototype Edison machine. Its inclusion here is very much a reflection of collector demand; neither Symposium Records nor this writer can vouchsafe its authenticity. It is discussed in an article by Henry Pleasants in number 85 of *Recorded Sound*.

MARIUS CHAMBON (1862-1945) started his career in Marseilles before joining the Paris Opéra. Following his début there as Marcel in *Les Huguenots* he went on to sing many major bass roles. It is perhaps a mark of the then popularity of Meyerbeer's masterpiece that LÉONIE TANÉSY (1860-1942) had made her Paris Opéra début as Valentine in the same opera just a few months earlier. She was one of the earliest Pathé artists, recording a substantial number of cylinders. We know very little about the extremely scarce Dutreih cylinders. The trio from *Faust*, which also includes the virtually unknown tenor MINVIELLE, is not listed in *Vertical-cut Cylinders and Discs* (Girard and Barnes). We do not even know the names of the artists who recorded the trio from *Roméo et Juliette*, another very early example of a concerted number on cylinder, Cylindre Multiplex being even less common than Dutreih.

This album ends, as it began, with a tenor. It is almost a truism that the fame of ENRICO CARUSO (1873-1921) is sufficiently secure to need no further note.

His three Pathé cylinders were long regarded as his very first recordings. Modern scholarship has demonstrated that in fact they were recorded after both the main series for The Gramophone and Typewriter Company. For whatever reason these cylinders, made by the Anglo Italian Commerce Company and issued by Pathé Frère, do not seem to me as successful as many recordings which appeared on the Pathé label. However, they have a special interest in that two of the three titles were never otherwise recorded by Caruso, and, in addition, the company's policy of including announcements allows us brief samples of the singer's speaking voice. Caruso's repertoire was far larger than that of Aramburo, and he sang most of the roles associated with the older artist. To be fair, any comparisons must take into account that when their cylinders were made Aramburo was in his sixties, over twice Caruso's age. Perhaps the most interesting reflection is that since the time of Caruso, most of the parts in which Aramburo specialized have become the preserve of the lirico spinto rather than the tenore robusto.

Stanley Henig

Acknowledgements: Tracks 8 to 12 and 15 to 19 were kindly made available by the late F. R. Westwood, and tracks 20 to 26 by the late Vladimir Gurvich. Symposium Records thanks Dave Mason for track 14, and François Nouvion for tracks 27 and 29. Thanks are due also to Paul Lewis and Adrian Tuddenham for assistance with the production.

1 to 6 It seems that the artist made and marketed these cylinders himself.

7 & 8 Such was the veneration in which Faure was held that in *Phonographes Pathé, Cylindres Enregistrés, Répertoire Français, 1903*, Faure's portrait appears first, before even that of Sarah Bernhardt. Faure wrote for the catalogue,

“Cher Monsieur Pathé,

Après ma visite dans vos établissements, je consens bien volontier à déclarer que vos appareils ont reproduit un morceau que vous m'avez fait entendre, d'une façon supérieure à ce que j'avais entendu jusqu'ici.

Agréez, cher monsieur l'expressions de mes sentiments les meilleurs

J. Faure de l'Opéra (Dimanche 11 Janvier 1903.)”

“Dear Mr. Pathé,

After visiting your establishment, I most willingly consent to declare that your machines reproduced a piece which you had me listen to in a manner superior to that which I have thus far heard. Yours...”

The key phrases in this testimonial are "un morceau" and "que vous m'avez fait entendre": "a/one piece which you played for me" or, literally, "which you had me listen to". Thus Faure did not testify to the excellence of a recording of himself, but to the general superiority of the Pathé system.

14 Lassalle eschews the high ending often sung at the time.

16 From a large 12¼cm dia. cylinder, the playing time of which necessitated two sides when later transferred to disc. As it is with orchestra, perhaps a little later than Lassalle's other cylinders.

22 A recording seemingly made at a somewhat boisterous party. Chaliapin sings (in Russian) some phrases from Act II as the quartet ends, commencing a few bars after “Il était temps!”: O nuit, étends sur eux ton ombre! Amour, ferme leur âme aux remords importuns! Et vous, fleurs aux subtils parfums, épanouissez vous.

27 Unnumbered 12¼cm light brown wax CYLINDRE MULTIPLEX, dark blue box, title in pencil, artists unknown.

28 This recording is included as many collectors have asked to hear it. However, many feel that its provenance is insufficiently established.

Further examples on Symposium Records of artists in this album, and of others mentioned by Professor Henig:

Emma Albani	1093 1251 1292
Emma Calvé	1100 1284
Enrico Caruso	1070 1209 1222 1279
Feodor Chaliapin	1105 1135 1151 1222
Antonio Cotogni	1069 1186/1187
Jean-Baptiste Faure	1089, now superseded
Jean Lassalle	1089, now superseded 1191
Lilli Lehmann	1207/1208
Sergei Levik	1151
Félia Litvinne	1101 1128 1135 1151 1173 1182 1292
Fernando De Lucia	1149 1209 1279
Victor Maurel	1089 1128
Nellie Melba	1188 1222 1284
Lillian Nordica	1251 1279 1308 1284
Adelina Patti	1222 1251
Maurice Renaud	1089 1100
Jean de Reszke	1284
Édouard de Reszke	1284
Marcella Sembrich	1284
Francesco Tamagno	1186/1187 1209 1222
<i>The Levik Memoirs</i>	1155 (book)

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