

## *SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1316*

### The Italian Red Label Tenors

The first paper record labels were printed in gold on black paper; presumably black allowed small imperfections to be less obvious.

The red celebrity label was introduced in 1901 at the request, it is believed, of a Russian dealer who wished to link the better records to the décor of his shop.

In 1902 and 1903 there were flurries of red label issues, recorded principally in England and Italy, and some of these also formed the first American "Red Seal" issues.

However in 1903 Victor, the American associate of Europe's The Gramophone (& Typewriter) Co., began to make its own celebrity records, and in a very short time, presumably for economic reasons, almost all fresh European celebrity issues were drawn from the Victor catalogue.

The Gramophone (& Typewriter) Company's proper first purpose, in common with any commercial concern, was to maximize profits for its shareholders, and it was this criterion which influenced the management to enhance the perceived value of certain records, and hence what could be charged for them, by introducing a whole array of label colours.

The public was informed that the more and greater the artists, the greater the cost of making them, but with rare exceptions, perhaps only Tamagno, Melba and Patti, variations in artist's fees were not a significant factor in overall cost.

Dealers were told that whilst records at high prices would not sell, their presence in the shops would bring the public in.

Thus by 1909, broadly in ascending order there were: black, mauve, red, orange, dark blue, green, pink, lilac, buff, pale green, pale blue and white labels. The last-named was for the sextet from *Lucia di Lammermoor* with a cast headed by Caruso. It cost 35/-, equal to the weekly wage of a skilled fitter at Rolls-Royce.

As indicated, after the first year or two most of the higher priced records, available worldwide, were of the big international artists, based mainly at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and almost entirely these were recorded in America. After 1903 there were relatively few domestic celebrity issues. In Austria and Germany, for example, even Slezak was on red label only when he appeared with Kurz.

In Italy there is an interesting anomaly. After 1903 there continued to be a relatively large number of domestic red label celebrity issues, and these were very largely of tenors. In the early years, besides the tenors Caruso (in 1902 still essentially a domestic artist), Garbin, De Lucia and Marconi, there were Pandolfini and Pinto, sopranos; Bruno contralto; Ancona, Giraldoni and Kaschmann baritones; and Gravina, bass.

After 1903 there are some nine additional tenors, and further series by De Lucia and Marconi. Other new artists are the sopranos Boninsegna and Caprile, but for one record of Frascani, the only new contralto is Cucini, and Ruffo the only

baritone. Remarkably, the worth of Zenatello seems not to have been recognised; his only series for the company had black labels, and Schipa's early records were also in a lesser category.

Can we explain this anomaly?

"Italy is the home of opera." will not do. Even if "England is a nation of Philistines.", the same can hardly be claimed of, say, Austria and Germany; and there are plenty of opera houses in France. And if it were true it would not explain the preponderance of tenors, and how rare many of their records are today.

After 1902 Caruso did not appear in Italy, the major part of his European career was primarily in Germany, with England coming second. Lack of exposure and a sense of neglect felt by the country of his birth must each have reduced sales of his records, thus promoting sales of records of other tenors.

In addition, Italy was still a subsistence economy with a relatively small urban skilled class. It was a different market with a different culture; sales could not be aimed at the lower classes as in England or Germany.

In 1909 the publishing house of Ricordi mounted a crippling action for royalties against the Gramophone Company (Italy) Ltd., so that after 1909 the Italian branch was in the hands of a dealership. As it was no longer controlled from London, it was not affected by the re-organisation along American lines which began in 1912. By spreading costs and stabilising profits this re-organisation aimed to please shareholders and plan for the future.

It may well be that the ratio of tenor records to other vocal records sold in Italy remained as elsewhere, so that with a larger number of tenors sharing the market for tenor records, individual pressing runs were inevitably very small with consequent rarity today.

EDOARDO GARBIN was born in Padua in 1865, and studied in Milan with Alberto Selva and with Vittorio Orefice, known to collectors for his pastiche opera *Chopin*. Garbin made his début at Vicenza in 1891 as Alvaro in *La Forza del Destino*. After experience at Genoa, Naples and the dal Verme in Milan he was engaged for La Scala in 1893, and in that year both he and his future wife, Adelina Stehle, were in the première of *Falstaff*. In 1900 at La Scala he was also in the première of *Zazà*. He sang with success in various European capitals, particularly in the operas of Puccini. In retirement he taught in Milan. He died at Brescia in 1943. He had a lyric voice of an immediately recognisable timbre, warm rather than intrinsically beautiful, used musically rather than to impress.

ARISTODEMO GIORGINI was born in Naples in 1879. Initial studies in Rome were followed by an unsuccessful début at Naples in 1903. After further studies under Perelli in Naples he was well received as Ernesto in *Don Pasquale* in Rome. This was in 1905, a few months after his first records were made. He sang with great success in many European cities, and in Chicago in the years 1912-1914. Throughout his career he suffered unusually much from stage fright. His last recordings included a "complete" *La Bohème* in 1928. In 1930 he returned to his

home town to teach, and he died there in 1937. His fine, well-produced, if not particularly distinctive, lyric voice was able to go easily to C.

GENNARO de TURA, also from Naples, was born in 1875. His career, from 1905 to 1939, was largely in the Italian provinces, though he sang in South America in 1910, at Covent Garden in 1912, and in Cuba in 1916. His sole appearance at La Scala was as a substitute. He retired to teach in Milan, and he died there in 1939. We hear a good, serviceable, if not outstanding voice. A lapse of intonation may be put down to nerves in the recording studio.

FRANCESCO SIGNORINI was born at Rome in 1860, and studied there. His career from his début at the age of 22 at Florence until the age of 30 was unpromising, but in 1890 he was acclaimed as Turiddu. He first sang at La Scala in 1897, from which time he was applauded in all of Italy's significant houses. In 1907 he sang in Los Angeles, in San Francisco and in South America. He retired in 1910 and taught in Rome until his death there in 1927. It is certainly a fine voice with real ring to it. For some the first piece may be somewhat loud and overemotional, but in the duet the voice is excellently controlled to match the music's line and the artists sing the conclusion as written.

AUGUSTO SCAMPINI was born in 1880 in Barcelona, but his career seems to have commenced in Italy in 1905. He visited South America in 1907, and appearances followed in Spain and Russia. In the season of 1910-1911 his singing in Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* and Puccini's *Saffo* was highly praised, as were his performances in Prague just before the war. During the war, in which he volunteered for the Italian army, he lost a leg, thus ending his career. He returned to Barcelona where he taught and where he died in 1939. It is an uncommonly fine voice used with great style. Many tenors were hailed as successors to Caruso, often with little cause. In Scampini's case the claim is at any rate understandable.

ANTONIO PAOLI was born in 1870 or 1871 at Ponce, Puerto Rico of mixed Corsican/Venezuelan parentage. From 1882 he lived with a relative in Spain. After initial studies in singing in Spain, a scholarship from the Spanish royal family in 1895 enabled him to study further in Italy. His début in 1897 in Valencia was as Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. He sometimes sang as Bascarán, perhaps a family name. In 1899 he made an auspicious début at the Paris Opéra as Arnold in *Guillaume Tell*. Success throughout Italy was immediate, and led to engagements in North and South America with a company under Mascagni, the first of several journeys to those territories. His voice, described as a tenor *dramatico assoluto*, was particularly suited to heavier roles such as Samson, Manrico, Vasco da Gama and Otello, and he acted well. During his career, which continued until the late '20s, he received various honours. He then returned home and taught, despite several illnesses, until his death in 1946. It was clearly a brilliant voice of power and distinction. He sang the part of Canio in one of the earliest "complete opera"

recordings. [This was long reported as having been conducted by the composer, but is now understood to have been “recorded in the presence of the composer”.]

UMBERTO MACNEZ was born at Pesaro in 1878. In 1901 he created the part of Arlecchino in the Verona première of Mascagni's *Le Maschere*, one of the seven simultaneous productions. He then sang small parts in the Italian provinces. In 1907 he appeared at the Teatro Coliseo, Buenos Aires. In 1910 he was the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto* with Mignon Nevada and de Luca at Covent Garden. He appeared as Almaviva in the season of 1910/1911 at the Costanzi, Rome. He was the Duke again in 1912 at the Teatro Donizetti of Bergamo. In 1913 he was at the Metropolitan Opera in such parts as Alfredo, Almaviva, Ernesto, Florindo (*Le Donne Curiose*), Hoffmann (American première) and Turiddu in company with Gadski, Fremstad, Hempel, Amato, Scotti, Didur etc., often with Toscanini. In 1913 he was at the Teatro Real, Madrid. He was in the special full centenary production of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at Pesaro in 1916 with Anitua, de Angelis, Galeffi and Kaschmann. In 1917 he sang the name part of *Marouf* in the Italian première which was at La Scala under the baton of the composer, Rabaud. At the Liceo, Barcelona next year he was Alfredo with Storchio and Battistini. His career continued at least until 1927, and he was last heard of in 1939.

GUIDO CICCOLINI was born in Rome in 1885, and was taught by Antonio Cotogni, teacher of Jean de Reszke, Mattia Battistini, Carlo Galeffi, Beniamino Gigli and Giacomo Lauri-Volpi. His début in 1907 was as Alfredo in *La Traviata*. In the years that followed he toured Europe with an opera company, and then, in 1911, he went to Australia as a member of Melba's company. In 1914 he was in Milan for the first performance of Wolf-Ferrari's *I Quattro Rusteghi*. From 1914 he sang in a series of Boston seasons. In 1915 he appeared in Havana, and, as the war ended, in Chicago. He sang at the funeral of his friend Rudolph Valentino in 1926. The latter part of his career, he retired in 1930, was in vaudeville. His death occurred in Rome in 1963. He seems to give a considerably better account of himself here than on his Edison records a few years later. Rodolfo's aria must be one of the most popular ever written, with both tenors and audiences; W.E.R.M. alone lists over a column of recorded versions. Ciccolini has style, emotion is carried in the musical line, cheap effects are unneeded.

BERNARDO de MURO was a Sardinian, born at Tempio Pausanio in 1881. At the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome his teacher, Alfredo Martino persuaded him that, like Jean de Reszke, Zenatello and Lauritz Melchior, he was not a baritone, as he thought, but a tenor. The records are most impressive, a world-class voice of clarion-like brilliance classifiable as lirico spinto or as tenore di forza, used with style and musicality, an obvious Otello after Tamagno and Zenatello. De Muro's career included five visits to South America, a season in North America, and engagements in Spain and Cuba, but he never sang at the Metropolitan Opera, Covent Garden, the Paris Opéra or the Vienna Imperial/State Opera. He appeared 382 times as Folco in Mascagni's *Isabeau* and around 200 times each as Radames,

Andrea Chénier, Manrico and Don José, but so far as can be determined, he never sang Otello. Thus he had a good and very busy career, but important rather than great. De Muro appeared as late as 1944; he died in Rome in 1955. [Diminutive stature, 5 foot, and inability to sustain a big role have been offered as reasons for not appearing as Otello, but they would have applied equally to Radames etc.]

BENIAMINO GIGLI worked as a chemist's assistant in Recanati, where he was born in 1890. In 1911, on the strength of lessons from a local teacher, he competed successfully for a place at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome. Alessandro Bonci, one of the judges, prophesied a great future for him. In Rome he studied with Enrico Rosati and Cotogni. Following his début in 1914 as Enzo in *La Gioconda* he sang in the provinces, then, in 1917 he sang with Rosina Storchio in Rome in the first performance of Mascagni's *Lodoletta*. In 1920 Toscanini invited him to La Scala to sing Faust in Boito's *Mefistofele*. After the death of Caruso in 1921 until his last concert in 1954 he was by popular esteem the world's greatest tenor, though more refined opinion tended to the view that the position was shared with Giovanni Martinelli. There were controversial aspects to his career. In 1932 he refused to accept a cut in salary to help the financially ailing Metropolitan; and during the second world war he sang often for German troops, made films and records in Berlin almost until the Nazi collapse, and attended receptions at which Hitler and his colleagues were honoured guests. After the war, whilst other artists rightly, sometimes wrongly, were forbidden employment, Gigli was enabled to continue his career virtually uninterrupted. Few will deny that Gigli's was one of the most sensually beautiful voices ever heard. The ability to mix chest and head tones at will astonishes. Some accused him of shouting, an impression which can be gained from some of the records, but a singer who shouts is unlikely to last forty years. It was simply a big voice. His mastery of assessing the optimum vocal projection for any venue died with him; we now have "sound enhancement".

Enrico ROMANO (1877 Sicily- ? ) His *Jery e Betly*, première Teatro Politeamo, Palermo, 1906 is one of more than twenty operas, mainly forgotten, based on Goethe's *Jery und Bätely*. He also wrote an opera *Zulma* from which Eugenia Burzio recorded an aria.

Attilio PARELLI (1874 near Perugia-1944 ? ) worked as a conductor in Paris, New York, where he directed the Manhattan Opera in 1906, Philadelphia and Chicago. He returned to Italy in 1925 and was artistic director of Milan Radio (EIAR). His operas include *Hermes* (Bologna, 1900) and *I Dispettosi Amanti* (Metropolitan Theatre, Philadelphia, 1912). The song in this album was recorded by Macnez in two versions, "Il 2-52727 e interpretato con prevalente dolcezza, il 2-52728 con prevalente vigorio".

Ubaldo PACCHIEROTTI (1877 near Padua-1916 Milan) wrote five operas including *L'Albatro* first given at the Teatro dal Verme, Milan in 1905, and *Eidelberga Mia!* first given at the Carlo Felice, Genoa in 1908 with José Palet in the main tenor part. (Palet's records, being in the Celebrity Catalogue, but

American-derived, are outside the scope of this album.) *Eidelberga Mia!* was very successful, casts including Constantino and Darclée, and it remained in the Italian repertoire certainly until 1914. It reached the Colon, Buenos Aires in 1909; and, in German, the Volksoper, Vienna in 1909, and Breslau in 1911.

Appendix – An Analysis of The Gramophone (& Typewriter) Company’s Celebrity Classifications.

	First phase 1901 – 1903	Second phase 1904 – 1924
Austria/Germany	(none)	Jeritza, Kurz, Lotte Lehmann Gerhardt, Onegin Jadlowker
England	Adams, Albani, Calvé  Valero van Rooy, Santley, Scotti Plançon	Melba, Patti, Edvina, Butt, Kirkby Lunn
France	Litvinne	Franz
Italy	Maurel, Renaud Bellincioni, Carelli, Pandolfini  Bruno, Fabbri Caruso, Garbin, Giraud, De Lucia Marconi, Tamagno  Kaschmann, de Luca, Sammarco Gravina	Boninsegna, Boronat, Caprile, Galvany, Pinto, Pareto Cucini, Frascani, Gay Ciccolini, Gigli, Giorgini, De Lucia, Marconi, Macnez, de Muro, Paoli, Scampini, Signorini, de Tura Battistini, Dragoni Pinza
Poland	Boronat, Kruszelnicka, Battistini,	(none)
Russia	Mei-Figner Figner Chaliapin	Nezhdanova Smirnov, Sobinov Chaliapin
Spain	(none)	Fleta

Celebrity Catalogue 1904-1924, Records entirely or largely of American origin: Alda, Amato, Ancona, Bori, Calvé, Caruso, Dalmorès, de Luca, Destinn, Eames, Farrar, Gadski, Galli-Curci, Gluck, Journet, Martinelli, McCormack, Melba, Palet, Plançon, Ruffo, Schumann-Heink, Scotti, Sembrich, Whitehill, Zanelli.

In this outline there is some blurring of detail. In particular, the label status of an artist could be changed. Nikolai Figner and Renaud, for example, were demoted to black label status. This accords with the commercial nature of the operation; a record which was excellent in 1904 can hardly have become artistically inferior in 1905.

In addition, a few artists are hard to classify, accordingly Arnoldson, Donalds and Tetrizzini have been omitted. Melchior, Piccaver and Schwarz are omitted as their celebrity records were made by Deutsche Grammophon after the events of the Great War had parted it from The Gramophone Company group.

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(Caruso, De Lucia, Marconi, Tamagno and Zenatello can be heard extensively on other Symposium Records Compact Discs.)