

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1320

THE FIRST OPERA RECORDINGS 1895 ~ 1902 A SURVEY

Volume II

This is the second of two volumes issued to mark the centenary of the first records of Enrico Caruso, made in Milan on April 11th 1902. As was explained in the introduction to the first volume (Symposium Records Compact Disc 1318), “A significant centenary should be celebrated, but a yet further selection from the same material, albeit in a special centenary wrapper, would not be a worthwhile addition to the catalogue; rather, attempt something more novel for the listener, and more challenging for the producer. Thus the question, ‘What could the avid collector of opera-records buy before Caruso?’ ”

This volume consists of transfers from records made in the years 1901 and 1902. It was a momentous period for the record industry: 10”/25cm records were first issued, paper labels were introduced, the first red-label “Celebrity” discs appeared, wax replaced zinc as the medium of recording, and electrolytic duplication of stampers enormously extended the quantity of pressings possible from one recording and greatly facilitated distribution. Caruso’s first records were amongst the first with all these improvements.

In this volume the first twenty-one tracks are from 7”/17.5cm discs, the remainder from the new 10”/25cm size. In general the improvements in sound quality are obvious, in some cases, astonishing, however some records of particular interest have been included, even though, due to their great rarity, copies in lesser condition have had to be used.

WLADISLAW FLORIANSKI [Lwów 1856-Lwów 1911] studied in his home town, making his début there in 1884 in *Palestrant* by Millöcker. His first operatic appearance, in Zelenski’s *Konrad Wallenrod* two years later, was so successful that he was invited to Prague for a guest performance, and remained there. He sang also in Berlin, Hamburg, Vienna and Warsaw, and was acclaimed, too, as a concert singer. His son, Antoni, under the family name Kohmann, was a concert singer. His records call to mind that the area was the source of many Jewish cantors.

ADAMO DIDUR [Sanok, Galicia 1874-Katowitz 1945] studied in Lemberg with Walery Wysocki, teacher, also, of Bohuss, Korolowicz-Wayda, Kruszelnicka, Myszuga and Ruszkowska. A patron enabled him to study further in Italy. In Milan in 1894 he made his début in the “Choral” Symphony. After a stage début in Rio de Janeiro he sang in Italy, reaching La Scala in 1896. His wife, like Harriet Kreisler, insisted on a tight work schedule, and he was much encouraged by Battistini. He sang at Covent Garden in 1905 and 1914. 1908 was most significant for him: Plançon retired and Chaliapin being but poorly received at the Metropolitan Opera, Didur was snatched from the competing Manhattan venture whilst briefly between contracts. He continued to sing there until 1933, though less frequently as the years

advanced. He returned to Poland and taught. In 1939 he was appointed director of the Warsaw Opera, but a few weeks later the house was destroyed. He continued teaching and was forming an opera company, but he died suddenly during a lesson.

WIKTOR GRABCZEWSKI [1863-1924] studied with Quattrini and made a concert début in Warsaw in 1888 before moving to Paris to study with Jean de Reszke. His operatic début was in Milan in 1890 as Germont père. He sang with success in various Italian towns and at Covent Garden [1892, 1897, 1903]. A high point of an extensive tour of the United States was his Silvio in the first American performance of *I Pagliacci* with Melba, Ancona and De Lucia at the Metropolitan Opera in 1893. He sang also in the first French performance there of *Manon* with Sybil Sanderson, Ancona, Plançon and Jean de Reszke. In 1895 he returned to Warsaw, where, and in leading Russian houses, he sang until shortly before his death.

EREMTZEVA probably sang with minor touring companies.

TEODOR BORKOWSKI No information has been found beyond the evidence of this record of a good and well-schooled voice.

ANDRE LABINSKY [1871-Moscow 1941] was in the chorus of the Marinsky Theatre before studying for a solo career with Giley. He returned to the Marinsky Theatre as a soloist from 1897 until 1911, much acclaimed in such works as *Carmen*, *Demon*, *Ivan Susanin* and *Lohengrin*. He then sang in Moscow, remaining there as a teacher after retiring in 1920. The timbre of the voice may be a little dry to some tastes, but his musicianship and histrionic power are at once apparent.

FEDOR DAVIDOVICH AVGUSTOV, born Brodyansky, sang opera and operetta with smaller companies in St. Petersburg, but immediately after the revolution he transferred to Moscow. In a long career, from circa 1901 to 1929 or after, he sang all the major Russian roles. His French and Italian opera repertoire included Nevers and Marcel (*Les Huguenots*), Escamillo, Germont père and Don Carlos (*Ernani*); his 34 operettas included *La Belle Hélène*, *Les Cloches de Cornville* and *Der Zigeunerbaron*. Presumably 'old' after the matrix number indicates that for a while the zinc process ran parallel with the new wax system

ALEXANDRE DAVIDOV [Poltava 1872-Moscow 1944] first sang with the Tiflis Opera in 1893. In 1896 he moved to the Marmontov Opera in Moscow, where, next year, he created the title role of *Sadko*. In 1911 he was engaged for the Imperial Opera of St. Petersburg, but from 1912 he was increasingly afflicted with deafness. He was decorated by the Soviet government, but nevertheless lived for about ten years in Paris. The assessment of Labinsky is fair here also.

ANNA KRUSZELNICKA is reported to have been a sister of Salomea Kruszelnicka, but little is known of her. If she was, then by inference, she was born at Tysiv, near Lemberg [Lwów] circa 1870, studied initially with Wysocky in Lwów, and continued to study whilst accompanying her sister in Italy. The

records, labelled "Ruthenian Soprano", indicate a voice so remarkably similar to that of Salomea that some have attributed the records to her.

BICE ADAMI [San Dona di Piave 1875-Padua 1969] studied in Buenos Aires and made her début as Santuzza there in 1898. In the latter part of the year she sang in The Netherlands. There she met Ferruccio Corradetti [1864-1934], whom she married, probably late in 1902. They appeared together in Italy and Sicily. In 1901 they were in Rome for one of the six simultaneous premières of Mascagni's *Le Maschere*; their colleagues included Bassi, Boninsegna and the composer. Their daughter was the famous soprano Iris Adami-Corradetti [1903-1998]. Around 1914 Corradetti's entanglement with another woman led to a divorce. Adami was well regarded, in 1902 at San Remo, for example, she appeared, albeit as a supporting artist, in concert with Gabbi, and Tamagno. The record reproduced here is believed to be the first commercial record made in Italy. The inscription reads, "LONDON/53163/2681/Italian/Soprano Solo/You know my mother/Voi lo sapete o Mamma/Cavalleria/(Mascagni)/ Cantata della Sig^{ra} Adami/MILANO".

ELISA BRUNO was a La Scala artist singing with major artists, with Tamagno, for example, in 1896 at Montevideo in *La Forza del Destino* and in 1899 at La Scala in *Guillaume Tell*. Her records, accorded celebrity status, included one of the very few red-label celebrity discs in the small size. The excerpt from *Il Trovatore* includes a piano version of the anvil chorus which precedes the aria. As early as 1902 artists pictures appeared on sleeves. The picture on the cover of this album now over a century old, is from the original sleeve of Bruno's record from *Samsone e Dalila*.

GIUSEPPE OXILIA [Montevideo 1865-Milan 1919] studied in Italy and, after performing in the provinces for a year, made his début at La Scala in 1889 in the première of *Asrael* (Franchetti). As Otello, which he sang with Maurel as Iago, he was compared with Tamagno. He was very successful in Italy, South America and Spain. In retirement he taught in Milan. The voice is strangely similar to that of John O'Sullivan (Symposium Compact Disc 1152).

MARIA ALEKSANDROVNA MICHAILOVA [Kharkov 1864-Perm 1943] studied with Grenning-Vilde in St.Petersburg, Saint-Yves Bax in Paris and Ronconi in Milan. She sang at the Imperial Opera for twenty years, first appearing whilst still a student, and at the Marinski Theatre. Her repertoire included operas by Mozart, Meyerbeer, Donizetti, Glinka and Rimsky-Korsakov, and she sang with leading artists, Chaliapin, Figner and Ershov, for example. After about 1905 she sang less in opera and more in concert, possibly because of a weight problem. She retired in about 1914 and taught until she was evacuated with her daughter from Leningrad. She had a light and excellently schooled voice. It is interesting that the gramophone has preserved a good number of recordings made only shortly after the works recorded were first produced.

NIKOLAI FIGNER Symposium Compact Discs 1255 and 1256 include everything of Nikolai and Medea Mei-Figner available when they were being prepared. The opportunity is taken of including two records of which copies have

come to light since then; they are amongst his best.

ANASTASIA VIALZEVA [1871-1913] sang mainly gypsy romances and operetta, but appeared occasionally as Carmen. The voice and the way it is used are utterly captivating. Following rejection by a lover she took her own life.

PAUL AUMONIER [Chasselay c.1873-Paris 1944] studied at the Conservatoire in Paris. His career, which spanned three decades, seems to have been based on Nice and Monte Carlo. Amazingly, with a voice of such quality and so well used, he seems never to have sung at the Opéra or at the Opéra Comique. The sound quality is remarkably good, amongst the best of its time, but there is considerable inconstancy of speed. This has been corrected as much as possible.

PAULINE AGUSSOL [Toulon 1863-] originally Charlotte-Marie Agussol, studied in Paris and made her début at the Opéra in 1888 in the role from which she sings here. The same year she appeared in *Roméo et Juliette* with Patti, Delmas, Melchissèdec and the de Reszke brothers. She had a long career mainly singing smaller parts, including Wagner. Ten-inch Berliner records are very scarce. This astonishingly vivid recording, even studio ambience is audible, plays for over four minutes.

LOUISE KIRKBY LUNN [Manchester 1873-London 1930] studied in Manchester and at the Royal College of Music. Her début was in a student performance of Schumann's *Genoveva* in 1893. Her professional début was in the première of Stanford's *Shamus O'Brien* in 1896. For two years after her marriage in 1899 she sang only in concerts, but she sang at Covent Garden from 1901. She appeared with Caruso at his first performance there in 1902 and sang Ortrude at short notice to replace Fremstad. Her success led a season at the Metropolitan Opera. Her appearances in opera, mainly at Covent Garden, continued until 1922. She was also extremely successful in concerts and on the festival circuit from 1895 until 1925. Her first records have a vividness which was rarely captured subsequently. 'nB' is believed to stand for 'new Berliner' i.e. Johnson's new wax recording.

PRIMO VITTI As has been indicated, 1902 was the year in which the gramophone may be said to have come of age as an instrument of culture. A coup, just a few days before the first records of Caruso were made, was a recording session at the Vatican. How or why one operatic record found its way into a liturgical series is unknown. Likewise, nothing is known of the artist beyond the evidence of the record. Thus, presumably he was a first child and found employment in one of the Vatican choirs. The voice is pleasant, if undistinguished, but the singer is distinguished for giving the ending as the composer wrote it.

For interest's sake data have been transcribed directly from the original records. Information added for completeness or to remove ambiguity is in square brackets. Dates for these years are no longer on the discs, but are derived from other sources.

Acknowledgements: The late Sir Paul Getty K.B.E. generously made

available records from his collection for tracks 1 to 6, 10, 12 to 17, 20 and 21; and thanks are due to Dave Mason for tracks 8 & 9; and François Nouvion for track 33. Paul Lewis and Adrian Tuddenham are thanked for assistance with the production.

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