SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1324

CRAIG-Y-NOS CASTLE
BRECONSHIRE
SOUTH WALES

December 30th 1905

Gentlemen,

The Gramophone of today I find is such an improved instrument for recording the human voice to the older machines with which so many of us are familiar, thus my hitherto objection to allow the thousands who cannot hear me sing personally to listen to the reproduction of my voice through the instrumentality of your Gramophone is now quite removed & the records which you have lately made for me I think are natural reproductions of my voice.

Adelina Patti Cederström

In both length and breadth Adelina Patti's extraordinary career stands apart from those of most of her contemporaries. It extended over 63 years from her début in New York, at the age of eight, to her final farewell at London's Albert Hall in 1914. The precise total is unknown, but she was a prodigious worker and there must have been at least 2,500 concert and opera performances. From accounts of her career, it is sometimes hard to decide whether to classify her as singer, performer, phenomenon, or even an industry. As a child prodigy she sang all over the United States and also in Cuba. By today's standards an element of child exploitation, even cruelty, is indicated in accounts of these exploits. In effect she had little real childhood and no regular education. She was very much part of a singing family for whom little else seems to have mattered. Her parents, Caterina Barili-Patti and Salvatore Patti, must have supervised what was in effect a family teaching programme. Adelina herself always gave credit to her older step-brother Ettore Barili as her sole vocal teacher. However, another step-brother, Antonio Barili, and another singer, Eliza Valentina Paravaelli, seemingly unrelated, played some part, and her older sister, Carlotta, also to enjoy a singing career, taught her the piano. To start so young and to continue so long, the vocal technique she imbibed must have been superb. She made her operatic début at the age of sixteen as the heroine in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. In less than four years she added a further 17 leading roles, mostly so-called "bel-canto", to her repertoire.

Patti's career as an opera and concert singer took her throughout Europe and North, South and Central America. Her earnings were enormous by any standards and, apart from a few recordings made very late in her career, all came from live

performances. It is difficult to translate the figures into modern terms. Even more than today, opera was supported by the affluent. Thus Patti tended to perform in the richest cities of the richest countries. Herman Klein comments that during her first season at Covent Garden she was only paid £32/10/- per performance, perhaps £1,500 in modern money. According to one calculation her earnings averaged more than £30,000 (£1.5 million today) for each of the 20 years following her London début in 1861, without taking into account the 'extras' from her American tours. In four months of 1887 she earned £50,000 for around thirty performances in Buenos Aires and Montevideo. Her final US tour, when she was already 60, yielded £40,000. By any standard she must have been very wealthy. However, it needs also to be remembered that Patti employed, directly or indirectly, a significant number of people and that she travelled in style, accompanied by a considerable entourage.

It was indeed an industry, and a highly profitable one.

Patti was born in 1843 at Madrid of Italian parents, but she spent her childhood in the United States. For ten years she performed extensively throughout the United States, and visited Canada and Cuba. Her Covent Garden début on May 14th 1861 was largely unheralded; her engagement by impresario Gye was too late for advertisement whilst achievements in the Americas were hardly an automatic route to a box office sell-out in London. In the circumstances *Musical World* suggested that, "Never was surprise greater, nor result more triumphant. Mlle. Patti was welcomed with the warmth due to her extreme youth and prepossessing appearance; but there was no enthusiasm… the young artist for a moment or two betrayed nervousness; but she instantly shook off all fear… and executed a passage di bravura which completely electrified the house… Mlle. Patti's success may be chronicled as a perfect climax, rising from the first scene and attaining its culminating point in the famous rondo finale, *Ah! non giunge*". J.W.Davidson in *The Times* largely concurred, describing the finale as sung with wonderful brilliancy, "the second verse rendered more brilliant by a variety of new ornaments, the high E flat and the F again successfully attacked".

As it happened London was ready for a new soprano sensation. The long time favourite, Giulia Grisi was at last retiring from the operatic scene (her first 'farewell' performances had taken place seven years before.) On July 6th Grisi and Patti appeared together in *Don Giovanni*, Grisi as Donna Anna and Patti as Zerlina, her only Mozart role, and both toured the English provinces later that year. On November 11th Grisi gave her final performance in Manchester whilst Patti was performing in Liverpool. Interestingly, during this same period another great singer, Jenny Lind, was also leading a concert party round the English provinces.

John Cone's recent most comprehensive biography of Patti has the very appropriate sub-title "Queen of Hearts". Disentangling proper critical appreciation from enthusiastic over-statement and hagiography is seldom easy, least of all for the Victorian era. The music critics were, it seems, all male. Between the lines, the impression is that no matter the role, Adelina Patti was in one sense always herself, and as such she had little if anything to learn about the arts of coquetry and flattery where the opposite sex was concerned. Writing some fifty years later, Herman Klein recounts a meeting with Patti in 1885; he was then nearly 40, just two years

younger than the diva, "She looked wonderfully youthful. Her smiling face, very little 'made up', and her svelte figure were those of a girl, although she had turned 42. But neither then, nor at any time did it occur to me to reflect how old Patti might be. She always defied the years… Are you coming to hear me in Carmen… she hoped that I should write a nice little article about her in *The Sunday Times*".

When Klein left, he told Patti "she had made me the proudest young man in London". As it happened Klein did just about manage to retain his head; he puzzled as to how and why she could have longed to sing *Carmen*, and when he heard the performance, "there was not a moment that made my pulse beat half so fast as her bewitching Zerlina had done thirteen years before".

This article can include only a brief details of the career, but the chronology by Tom Kaufman suggests total dedication to it, even though dates of repeat performances in specific locations are excluded. In Liverpool in the late summer of 1861 she sang Violetta in *La Traviata* and Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* on successive nights. At Covent Garden for three of the four months 1863 season, she sang in about 30 performances of 9 operas; during that year she also performed in Paris, Vienna, Frankfurt, Mannheim, Wiesbaden, Berlin and Madrid. In her Vienna seasons of 1874 and 1877 she appeared on each occasion in ten different operas over a span of just two months.

In 1885 Covent Garden remained closed save for a one month opera season organized at the last minute by Mapleson. There were just 14 under-rehearsed performances of 11 operas. The entire season revolved around Patti who had been performing opera across the United States since late autumn the previous year. Patti sang on ten occasions in eight of the operas. Clearly the ensemble left more than a little to be desired. According to Harold Rosenthal, when Patti sang Carmen she met her Don José for the first time in the actual performance. After the final performance it was presumably Mapleson who organized a 'spontaneous' carriage procession for the prima donna through the streets of central London, a happening dismissed for its 'vulgarity' by one critic. The *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* was perhaps in the circumstances more than a little ungrateful, the "star system has received a fatal illustration; should Italian opera be given there next year, we trust the management will see the futility of relying on a prima donna at £500 a night, and will devote half that amount to the payment of less costly and competent vocalists, and the attainment of better ensembles than are possible under the pernicious star system against which we have always protested".

At one level the ultimate judge of the star system has always been the public. Patti was still relatively young by 1885, but she had been singing at the highest level in opera for more than a quarter of a century. Her Covent Garden appearances were followed by a British concert tour and an operatic foray across Europe. Thereafter the bulk of her operatic performances were in the Americas, although there was one further season (1895) at Covent Garden, appearances in Paris, Monte-Carlo and Nice, and her only three performances at La Scala, Milan (as Violetta in *La Traviata*). Pompeo Cambiasi's chronology of La Scala describes these as 'buonissimo', his second highest rating.

In the context of the final phase of Patti's operatic career, there is an interesting assessment of her last appearances in Vienna in concert and opera in 1886 by Hugo Wolf, who was notoriously difficult to please, "Adieu à Vienne - In this farewell greeting there is a suggestion of self-criticism… we must add our voice to hers… the tones pour forth silvery clear… but only on the level terrain of the middle voice. She can no longer climb the precipitous heights of the high E and above, nor roam those perilous paths from which trill upon trill once poured down… that is all a thing of the past. The fastidious taste of her singing, however, the agility and refinement in the execution of fioritura and mordents, excite admiration as before". It is worth bearing in mind that nearly twenty years would elapse between this critique and Patti's recordings.

In the final phase of her career she concentrated on the concert platform. There is little hard information as to content, but a good deal of her repertoire consisted of operatic arias. After her final visit to the United States over the winter of 1903/1904 there were tours of the British provinces and individual concerts in London, Paris and St. Petersburg. Patti also made a final return and farewell to the operatic stage, albeit in private. The great tenor Jean de Reszke had his own theatre within his sumptuous Paris home. There on 25th May 1907 *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* was performed with Patti as Rosina, Giuseppe Anselmi as Alamaviva, Mario Ancona as Figaro, Édouard de Reszke as Don Basilio, and Antonio Pini-Corsi as Don Bartolo. The chorus, made up of Jean de Reszke's pupils, included the youthful Maggie Teyte. Patti interpolated Mozart's "Voi che sapete" and Tosti's "La Serenata" into the lesson scene.

Patti died at "Craig-y-nos", her Welsh country home in 1919.

In assessing the impact Patti made on contemporary reviewers and critics, it is hard to know where to start, so much was written. Eduard Hanslick heard her in both Vienna and Paris. He considered her Juliet in Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* to be a "perfect masterpiece" and he praised "the ease with which her light, silvery voice masters the high tessitura". His analysis probes the secret of Patti's long and successful career, "Always rhythmically strict as regards measures, she treats the rhythm within each measure with individual freedom; nothing is dragged, nothing is rushed, and yet everything is animated right down to the softest vibrations of tone". For another view one can turn to George Bernard Shaw, unlike Davidson, Klein and Hanslick, far removed from the musical establishment. He probably did not hear Patti sing before the early 1880s and his assessment may seem at first sight to be rather harsh. "There has not yet been witnessed a dramatic situation so tragic that Madame Patti would not get up in the middle of it to bow and smile…. She is simply a marvellous Christy Ministrel and when you have heard her sing 'Within a Mile' in the Albert Hall so perfectly that not a syllable or a whisper is lost, you have heard the best that she can do. And this best is not to be despised… Between it and the highest sort of music there is only a chaos of artificiality, a demand for which would be only a sign of that musical curiosity which people acquire from reading about the subject, and which is very different from true love of music".

Hanslick was writing in 1879; Shaw a decade later. In different ways Wolf, Hanslick and Shaw all reach to the very heart of Patti the performer and they help

explain the secret of her long and successful career. Much that they admire remain evident in her records made in December 1905 and June 1906. It seems appropriate that the diva herself should have the final word. According to Landon Ronald, her accompanist at the first recording session, "Her first selection was 'Voi che sapete'…. She begged to hear it at once… I shall never forget the scene… She had never heard her own voice, and when the little trumpet gave forth the beautiful tones, she went into ecstasies. 'Ah! Mon Dieu! Maintenant je comprends pourquoi je suis Patti! Oh, oui! Quelle voix! Quelle artiste! Je comprends tout!'"

Professor Stanley Henig

Very early in the history of the gramophone it was recognised that the faster the turntable revolved, the greater the quality of sound possible, but the shorter the playing time, and vice versa. Many companies decided for themselves what best suited their particular markets; others seem to have set their recording speeds afresh each morning with complete abandon. Speeds of revolution of turntables of both recording and reproducing machines were controlled by a mechanical governor, a most ingenious device, but incapable of long-term stability. Not only was it easily reset, but before the advent of stable electric supplies accurate measurement of speed was difficult. In a musical household if a record of the "Moonlight" Sonata did not come out in C sharp minor the error would be recognised and the speed adjusted, but a non-musical family would hear poor piano sound and have a false idea of the pianist's interpretation and tempi. With vocal records, which dominated the "classical" catalogue, even musical households would encounter problems, because relatively few have ready access to music libraries, and also as many singers transpose music to suit themselves. If a record of a tenor, for example, is played too fast there is a tendency towards Donald Duck-like sounds; and if too slow then a leaden and lifeless singer is heard. The tenor Jean de Reszke was approached by several record companies; it is widely believed that, having himself heard records of colleagues played at wrong speeds, he refused to allow records of his own voice to be released. The earliest public recognition of the problem was in 1904 when Melba's first records had the keys in which the music was sung printed on the labels. The only other instance was five years later for Clara Butt. Later, by general consensus, a speed of 78rpm was adopted as the best compromise.

Today nobody can remember from personal experience the voices of that era and with compact disc players variation is not generally possible. Thus, with the level of scholarship rightly expected today it is incumbent on record companies to make every effort to establish speeds correctly.

What standard of pitch is to be used? There are two principal considerations: a) Until relatively recently church organ builders, wind instrument manufacturers, orchestras, orchestral conductors and ageing singers all had there own ideas on what standard of pitch should be adopted. It is known, for example, that in the years relevant to this note various singers complained that the pitch at Covent

Garden was too high. and b) Today everyone talks about 440 vibrations per second for A; but relatively few realise that even if the oboe to which the orchestra tunes is itself at precisely 440, the pitch soon rises as the strings search for a brighter sound. [This is not the same as being out of tune which occurs when the orchestra has settled down to, say, A=443, but one player or singer is at, say, A=435.]

When Tamagno agreed to make records he insisted that the apparatus must be taken to his villa. His health was beginning to fail. It is possible that he wanted to be able to transpose freely and without embarrassment, even that his domestic piano was tuned down a bit. In the course of work on Symposium's Tamagno issue it became clear that all the internal evidence discounted such notions. Tamagno had demanded and got a huge fee; he would provide a fully professional service. Tamagno's "Di quella pira" is at score pitch, complete with ringing top C's. Transpositions had been assumed previously when the habit had been to play his records at speeds typical for the particular recording company at the time. However, evidence has now been uncovered that the machine on which most of his records were cut was deliberately set to a somewhat higher speed to achieve a superior quality.

Likewise Patti, some ten years older in 1905 than Tamagno in 1903, but in better health, also insisted on the apparatus coming to her. Of course a queen does not go to her courtiers, they go to her, but perhaps her piano was tuned down. However, a conversation with a leading piano manufacturer suggests that this is most unlikely.

It seems reasonable to suppose that Patti at the age she was, had some notion that posterity would judge her by her records. Indeed, in her message to her much younger husband she speaks of him having her voice by him for ever. So, as with Tamagno, apart from the large fee there was an additional reason for providing a fully professional service. However, in many instances Patti certainly transposes.

La Sonnambula, *Don Giovanni* and *Martha* were amongst the operas in which Patti sang in her first season in 1859, and *Faust* entered her repertoire in 1863, but she is not known ever to have appeared in Le *Nozze di Figaro*, *Norma* or *Mignon*. Whilst "Voi che sapete" and "Connais-tu le pays" are fairly obvious choices to supplement the concert repertoire of an elderly singer, "Casta diva" most certainly is not. However, she is reported to have sung "Casta diva" flawlessly at the age of seven so she may well have felt a particular attachment to it.

The Mozart arias raise the matter of style. Probably every age tends to believe that its own views on performance are right. Patti studied in the 1850s so it is probable that her notions of style and interpretation reflect what was then the norm. Obviously she would have been influenced by what older singers were doing, and during the following half century by her contemporaries.

"Pur dicesti" is amongst Patti's most successful records. There is lightness of touch, a real feel for the music, and trills, as always with this singer, of the highest quality.

"Batti, batti" starts very well, but later on the singer seems to become tired. It has been suggested that the end is rushed to fit the record, but others in the series are up to a minute longer.

Patti must have sung the *Faust* aria on an enormous number of occasions; now she is obviously stretched by it. Thus it is the more remarkable that hers is one of the few versions to convey Marguerite's girlish surprise on seeing the jewels. The first version was not published, perhaps because Patti giggles at the end; a pity as it is more vivid than the remake.

The display of fireworks in Arditi's "Il Bacio" astonishes. Patti has to breath more frequently than she would once have had to do, but it is far beyond anything we might have expected of a singer of her years. The record was not passed for issue. There are signs of tiredness towards the end and a high note which is not brilliant, but tiredness is more obvious in "Batti, batti" and there are less good top notes elsewhere. Thus the reason may have been that the louder passages did not survive a sufficient number of playings on the machines of the day.

Of the pieces she recorded, Patti is most able to demonstrate a fine legato line in "Kathleen Mavourneen". The second version is generally superior.

"The last rose of Summer", is a very beautiful melody, a folk song imported into an opera in which Patti sang. One wonders which version she thought of as she sang for the record. The label writer thought it was Thomas Moore's arrangement. The second version is half a tone lower than the first.

The long sustained lines of "Ave Maria", are testing. They are managed surprisingly well in view of shortages of breath elsewhere. However, this record, too, was withheld; perhaps it was felt to be a somewhat uninspired performance.

"La Serenata" is a fine song by a composer seriously underrated today. Patti's performances of it, particularly the second, are amongst her best.

Today "Home, sweet home" would be referred to as Patti's signature tune, she makes as much of it as can reasonably be made. Technically "Pur dicesti" and "Home, sweet home" are also from operas in which Patti did not appear, but she would have known them as concert pieces. Of the unpublished items, some, such as this one, survived in a few pressings, others, e.g. "Ave Maria", were released as special editions commencing in the '30s.

"Si vous n'avez rien à me dire" is presumably by Baroness Willy de Rothschild, with a country estate near Königstein, friendly with Empress Frederick, sister of Edward VII.

"On Parting", a setting of Byron's "The Kiss Dear Maid" published ?first in 1867 in Paris as: *Le Baiser de l'Adieu/Il Bacio d'Addio, Musique de Adelina Patti/Homage à l'éminent compositeur Michele Costa*. An English edition of 1870 reads: *The Kiss Dear Maid/song/The Poetry by Lord Byron/The music composed and dedicated to Michael Costa Esq*[re.] *by his very devoted friend Adelina Patti*. Patti composed also a waltz for piano, "Fleur du Printemps" and a song, "Speme Arcana" and there are "Douze Études pour Soprano" by her sister Carlotta Patti.

In "Casta diva" the trills and turns are truly superb. The ornaments in the second part presumably echo practice from the work's earliest performances.

"Connais-tu le pays" is remarkable, the composer and the singer together capture perfectly the wistful longing of the text. Would it be heretical to think that this version has the spirit of the poem more than the German settings?

"Ah non credea" has delicacy and pathos; the ornaments which the singer can still manage are exquisitely drawn.

"Le Calesera" is astonishing, exceeding in vivacity and in throwing off the years even "Il Bacio" and "La Serenata". It was issued, but quickly withdrawn, so that original pressings are of great rarity. Reasons advanced are that her husband objected to it, and that, being very heavily recorded, it wore very badly. This song is in Spanish, a convenient point at which to note that in English, French, Italian, Latin and Spanish Patti's enunciation is equally excellent.

The remainder of the songs were, as concert programmes, record catalogues and surviving copies indicate, much liked. Private performance linked the amateur to the professional; public taste was much more naïve than now. We are separated from the overt emotion and sentimentality of these simple songs by the harrowing events of two world wars, and numbed by instantaneous reduction of almost daily genocide to a multicoloured patch of two dimensional light. We preserve them and marvel at them as artefacts, scarce understood, of a bygone age.

		Craig-y-Nos, 4th to 7th December 1905 Landon Ronald, piano
1	537f	Le Nozze di Figaro (Mozart)-Voi che sapete
2	538f	Arminio (Lotti)-Pur dicesti
	539f	omitted: Clari or The Maid of Milan (Bishop)-Home sweet home
3	540f	Old folks at home (Foster)
4	541f	Don Giovanni (Mozart)-Batti, batti, o bel Masetto
5	*542f*	*Faust (Gounod)-Ah! Je ris de me voir…O Dieu que de bijoux*
6	543f	Faust (Gounod)-Ah! Je ris de me voir…O Dieu que de bijoux
7	544f	*Il Bacio (Arditi)*
8	545f	Kathleen Mavourneen (Crouch) [a]
9	546f	*[Martha (Flotow)]-'Tis the last rose of summer (Moore) **
10	547f	*Ave Maria (Bach-Gounod) with Marianne Eissler, violin*
11	548f	La Serenata (Tosti)
12	549f	Robin Adair (origin unclear)
13	550f	*Clari* or *The Maid of Milan (Bishop)-Home sweet home*
14	551f	Si vous n'avez rien à me dire (Baroness Willy de Rothschild)
15	552f	Comin' thro' the rye (text Burns-melody trad.)
16	553f	[Martha (Flotow)]-'Tis the last rose of summer (Moore) * [b]
	554f	*[unknown]*
17	555f	On the banks of Allan Water (trad. arr. Horn)
18	556f	On Parting (Adelina Patti)
	557f	omitted: Within a mile of Edinboro' town (Hook)
19		New Year Greeting

Craig-y-Nos, June 1906 Alfredo Barili, piano

20 676c Kathleen Mavourneen (Crouch)
21 677c La Serenata (Tosti)
22 678c Within a mile of Edinboro' town (Hook)
679c *[? Clari or The Maid of Milan (Bishop)-Home sweet home]*
680c *[unknown]*
23 681c Norma (Bellini)-Casta diva!
24 682c Mignon (Thomas)-Connais-tu le pays?
25 683c La Sonnambula (Bellini)-Ah, non credea mirarti
26 684½c La Calesera (Yradier)

All the music Patti recorded is included; two duplicates had to be omitted.

Italics: not originally issued

* Origin of melody unclear; arr. by Moore; incorporated by Flotow into Martha.

[a] 73 has been reported written by hand on the sleeve of a test pressing.

[b] 76½ has been reported written by hand on the sleeve of a test pressing.

Even if these markings are accepted as contemporary, the means of measurement, and hence the accuracy, are unknown.

A cylinder once ascribed to Patti has since been identified as by Lucette Korsoff.

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