

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1369

THE STARS WERE SHINING BRIGHTLY – Volume III

CAROL BRICE [Indianapolis 1918-Norman, Oklahoma 1985] was the daughter of an African-American minister of the Congregational Church. After singing with the Sedalia Singers she read for a degree in music at the Talladega College, Alabama and in 1939 she won a scholarship to the Julliard Graduate School. In 1944 she won an award from the Naumburg Foundation. This included sponsorship of a recital at the Town Hall, New York. She was an immediate success and went on to become a most distinguished oratorio and Lieder singer. She toured South America in 1950. In 1958 she appeared in *Regina* (Blitzstein) and *Porgy and Bess*, in the latter also in France, and she was in many musicals on Broadway. After her retirement in 1975 she taught at the University of Oklahoma and founded an opera company for black singers.

RICHARD CROOKS [Trenton, New Jersey 1900-Portola Valley, near Los Angeles 1972] was first noticed as a boy soprano in a church choir. After war service in the American Air Force he studied in New York under Sidney Bourne, Frank La Forge and Léon Rothier. He turned down an opening on Broadway, despite needing the money, then, in 1923 Walter Damrosch engaged him for nine concerts with the New York Symphony Orchestra. In 1927 he went on a long concert tour in Europe, made a successful début as Cavaradossi at Hamburg, sang in the “Choral” symphony under Toscanini and in the American première of *Das Lied von der Erde* under Mengelberg. In 1928 he sang in many parts of Europe and in 1930 he was a great success in Philadelphia. From 1933 to 1945 he was at the Metropolitan Opera and from 1940 to 1943 at Chicago. He also made concert tours of Australia and South Africa. He retired in 1946. He was at his best in such works as *Don Giovanni*, *Faust*, *Manon*, *Mignon* and *Roméo et Juliette*.

MARINA KOSHETZ [Moscow 1912-Malibu 2000] was the daughter of Alexander de Schubert, an artist, and the soprano, Nina Koshetz. When she was three the family emigrated to Paris where she attended school and studied the piano. After the Great War her mother’s career took them to the United States and they eventually settled in California. Marina was taught singing and drama by her mother from childhood and she made her début as an actress in 1933 in the picture *Little Women*, which starred Katharine Hepburn. Her first important role, in 1935, was Steffi in *All the Kings Horses*, with Carl Brisson and Mary Ellis. This was so successful that she was immediately cast in *Car 99*, with Fred MacMurray and Ann Sherwin. Throughout the 1930s the glamorous Marina whose good looks, charm and personality matched her musical and acting talents, also appeared on radio in NBC’s Kraft Music Hall and as a guest on other major programmes. Prodded by her mother, who acted and taught singing to a number of Hollywood celebrities, she now appeared as Marina

Koshetz and in the 1940's concentrated more on singing. She appeared with leading symphony orchestras and sang briefly in opera, as Tatiana in *Yevgeny Onegin* in San Francisco, and later in *Carmen*, *Die Fledermaus* and Musorgsky's *Sorochintsy Fair* at the Hollywood Bowl and other venues. Her continuing film career included *Luxury Liner*, in which she sang music from *Aida* with Lauritz Melchior, and *The Great Caruso* with Mario Lanza. Later on, as her acting career declined, she played small roles in other films. Her final performance was in a 1967 production *The Busy Body*, a comedy which featured Sid Caesar and introduced Richard Pryor. She sang music by Rachmaninov, Prokofiev, and other Russian composers in concerts under Stokowski, Koussevitsky and Bernstein. Koshetz spent her final years at Malibu, California writing, painting and teaching. She was twice married. Just before she died, she completed a biography of her mother and a screenplay about her mother and Sergei Rachmaninov, both titled *The Last Song*.

MARJORIE LAWRENCE [Deans Marsh, a small village 100 miles from Melbourne 1909-Little Rock, Arkansas 1979] was born to a musical family and was taught piano and singing from the age of seven. In 1926 she went to Ivor Boustead in Melbourne and in 1928, on winning a competition as a contralto, she travelled to Paris to study with Cécile Gilly. Her début as Elisabeth (*Tannhäuser*) at Monte Carlo followed in 1932. After a year's experience at Lille she was equal to Paris, appearing at the Opéra as Aïda, Donna Anna, Rachel (*La Juive*), Brünnhilde (*Die Walküre* and *Die Götterdämmerung*), Salomé (*Hérodiade*) and Salome (*Salome*). From 1935 to 1941 she was at the Metropolitan Opera. Her work there included Alcestis in that house's first performance of *Alceste* on 24 January 1941. For Oscar Thompson (*New York Sun*), "Miss Laurence made a brave showing with the role that was intended for Germaine Lubin. . . she was graceful and conscientiously restrained." In 1937 she sang in England and in 1938 at Zoppot. In 1939 she returned home for an extended tour. In Mexico in 1941 she was hit by poliomyelitis, but she was determined to carry on. Thus in 1943 she returned as a chair-borne Amneris, as a reclining Isolde and in *Tannhäuser* as Venus, and in 1944 she travelled enormous distances to sing for troops in the South-West Pacific. Lawrence returned in triumph to the Opéra in 1945 and in 1947 at Chicago she appeared in a concert performance as *Elektra* in German. In later appearances as a contralto her warm personality compensated for the voice's decline. In later years she taught and, up to 1976, occasionally sang.

ROBERT MERRILL né Morris Miller [Brooklyn, New York 1917- 2004] was taught by his mother, Lillian Miller-Merrill, a noted concert singer. He went on to study under Armando Agnini, Renato Bellini and Samuel Margolis in New York. He financed these studies by working as a professional baseball player. He sang on various American radio stations and in 1944 he appeared as Amonasro at Trenton, New Jersey. In 1945 he won the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air and was immediately engaged to sing Germont-père with Licia Albanese and Jan Peerce.

He remained there for the next 30 years. He sang in Europe, he had a successful film career and he was chosen by Toscanini for two of his opera recordings.

EZIO PINZA né Fortunato Pinza [Rome 1892-Stamford, Connecticut 1957] was a racing bicyclist before studying under Ruzza at Ravenna Conservatoire and Vizzani at Bologna Conservatoire. His début was as Oroveso (*Norma*) in 1914 at Spezia. Military service interrupted his career until 1919. He then had many successes in Italy and was chosen by Toscanini for the première of Boito's *Nerone*. In 1928 he began a twenty-two year association with the Metropolitan Opera, finding time also to appear at Buenos Aires, Chicago, Covent Garden, San Francisco, Paris, Salzburg and Vienna. He excelled in Verdi, but perhaps his greatest role, in which he appeared more than 200 times, was Don Giovanni. On leaving the Metropolitan Opera in 1948 he began a second career in operetta and musicals. Notable amongst these was his resounding success in *South Pacific*.

FERRUCCIO TAGLIAVINI [Barco near Reggio Emilia 1913-Reggio Emilia 1995] studied engineering, but his father persuaded him that he should sing. Thus he studied under Italo Brancucci in Parma and, after military service, under Amedeo Bassi in Florence. There he made his début as Rodolfo in 1938. In 1939 he sang in *L'Amico Fritz* under the composer at Rome and by 1942 he was at La Scala as Count Almaviva with Gianna Pederzini and Titto Gobbi, continuing to appear there until 1953. Tagliavini was one of the most successful tenors of the post-war years, appearing at almost every significant centre of opera; his longest engagement, from 1947 to 1954 at, the Metropolitan Opera. He retired from opera in 1965, but continued to give recitals until 1981. He was probably at his best in the great roles of Italian opera. It has been said that tenors model themselves on the greatest of their peers, though perhaps they are so modelled by their teachers. Certainly on records Costa Milona, Alfred Piccaver and Mario Chamlee sound at times uncommonly like Caruso, and Tagliavini sometimes like Gigli.

PIA TASSINARI née Domenica Tassinari [Modigliana near Forli, Romagna 1903-Faenza, Ravenna 1995] studied with Alessandro Vezzani in Bologna and with Manlio Marcatoni in Milan. She made her début as Mimi at Casale Monferato, Alessandria in 1927. From 1931 to 1956 she sang principally at La Scala and in Rome; to great acclaim in both. Pia Tassinari and Ferruccio Tagliavini were married in 1941, though they later parted, and appeared frequently together, e.g. at Amsterdam and the Hague (1943), Buenos Aires (1945) and New York (1947). She was highly regarded in such parts as Marguérite, Mimi and Tosca. From 1952 until her retirement in 1962 she sang mezzo-soprano roles, also with great popularity, e.g. Amneris, Carmen and Dalila.

JOHN CHARLES THOMAS [Meyersdale near Carlisle, Virginia 1891-Apple Valley, California 1960] was the son of a Methodist minister. After studying medicine at Baltimore he studied singing at the Peabody Conservatory, Boston and with Adelin Fermin in New York. In 1915 he made his début as an operetta singer

on Broadway. Success came with *Apple Blossoms*, a concoction by Fritz Kreisler in a period of enforced idleness during the Great War. Despite his undoubted popularity in operetta, Thomas yearned to sing opera. Thus, in 1922 he journeyed to Paris to study with Jean de Reszke. A concert in Brussels led to an engagement at the Théâtre de la Monnaie from 1925 to 1928, where he sang in the première of *Les Malheurs d'Orphée* by Milhaud. He returned to America for appearances in Chicago, Philadelphia and San Francisco, and then, from 1934 to 1943 he was at the Metropolitan Opera. After the war he made guest and recital appearances, and a big tour of Australia. In retirement he managed a radio station.

ARMAND TOKATYAN [Plovdiv, Bulgaria 1894-Pasadena, California 1960] was of Armenian stock. When his family moved to Alexandria, he began to earn a little by singing in cafés. When the family moved to Paris he worked as a tailor, but continued to sing. He returned to Egypt, earning his keep in operetta. The director of opera in Cairo urged him to study for a career in opera, so he went to Nino Cairone in Milan. He made his début as des Grieux (*Manon Lescaut*) in 1921 at Milan and almost immediately set out for America as a member of the Scotti Opera Company. In 1923 he joined the Metropolitan Opera, remaining there until 1946. Besides the staple roles, such as Alfredo, Don José, Faust, Kleinsachs and Rodolfo; he was also heard in less often performed works, *Signor Bruschino*, *La Rondine*, *La Habanéra* (Laparra) for example. In Europe he was at the Staatsoper, Berlin (1932); the Staatsoper, Vienna (1931-1934) and at Covent Garden (*Turandot*, 1934). He retired in 1948 to teach in Los Angeles.

Track 4 conducted by Howard Barlow.

Tracks 11, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19 conducted by Donald Voorhees.

Tracks 10 to 24 Bell Telephone Hour.

Track 26 Tato-Nacho; nome de plume of Esperon Ignacio Fernandez

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