



Giuseppe Creatore  
June 21, 1871 - August 14, 1952

The most distinguished and the most prolific recording artist of the Italian bandmasters appears in a photo taken during the early 1920s. The Creatore Band records were made from 1905 to 1940 and number about 145 sides. The photo is from the collection of the late RCA Victor Executive, Harold D. Smith. (Courtesy of ARSC member Gerald Parker, Music Division, National Library of Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1A CN4.)

THE MAPLESON CYLINDER PROJECT  
at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound  
New York Public Library

A Preliminary Report by David Hall - Curator  
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Some fifteen years ago this writer, soon after assuming charge of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound, made a resolve to provide aural access to all of the contents that might be salvageable from the 120 items in original wax cylinder or lacquer disc transfer format held at the Archives as the Lionel Mapleson Collection, these documenting in 2-minute segments actual stage performances at the Metropolitan Opera during the seasons 1900-01, 1901-02, 1902-03. The basic job was finally completed on June 22, 1981 after 16 intensive working sessions with Archives sound engineer Tom Owen. The history preceding this accomplishment is outlined in the accompanying Provisional Mapleson Cylinder Chronology -- "Provisional" because even as we write these lines, new information is coming to light as regards history and provenance -- and even as regards aural data: for example, verification that one of the cylinders offers an episode from Ignace Jan Paderewski's opera, Manru, on the occasion of its first American performances in February of 1902.

The purpose of this report is to give an account of the major findings encountered by Archives sound engineer Tom Owen and this writer -- findings both aural and the documentary proved at times to be mind-boggling within their respective spheres.

First, let it be said that none of the work could have been accomplished without the effort, scholarship, and caring of many who came before us, beginning in 1937 when Geraldine Farrar persuaded the Met's venerable librarian, Lionel S. Mapleson, that the collection of wax cylinders he had recorded from the stage of the Metropolitan Opera as a young man, engaged in what he considered to be a delightful lark, could be preserved in permanent form and made available to those seeking to hear, unhampered by recording studio restrictions, the legendary voices of Jean de Reszke and his fellow Met stars; and that, furthermore, 40-year-old William H. Seltsam, who in his spare time from an office job, ran an outfit in Bridgeport, Connecticut, called the International Collectors' Club devoted to the reissuing of historical vocal discs, was the man to do the job. Of the 73 cylinders that eventually saw public issue between 1939 and 1966, all but nine were under the IRCC aegis.

It was the late G. Lauder Greenway, working with Carleton Sprague Smith and Philip L. Miller of the New York Public Library in 1939, who helped obtain for that institution a batch of a dozen cylinders that was no longer in Mapleson's possession at the time Seltsam was introduced to the latter; and out of this grew a resolve on Greenway's part that the Library would one day have in its custody all the Mapleson cylinders known to be extant, a situation that came to pass by the spring of 1962.

Crucial as a guide to working with the cylinders at R & H have been the published articles by Ira Glackens (The Gramophone, November 1938) and by Canadian philosophy professor-vocal record collector, John Stratton, in The Record Collector (July/August 1961) and the British Institute of Recorded Sound journal Recorded Sound (July 1967, July 1968) to which must be added Stratton's invaluable personal assistance and counsel, beginning with a 1967 visual inspection and inventory of the R & H Mapleson cylinder holdings, followed by a detailed report and suggestions as to what needed to be located among those cylinders not publicly issued.

The work of Robert Carneal at the Library of Congress, of Wilfried Zahn at the Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv in Frankfurt, of George Alexandrovitch at Stanton Magnetics, and of John Fesler of International Tapetro-nics Corp. has been of inestimable assistance in dealing with the technical aspects of the Mapleson project, not to mention the ingenuity of Arthur Shifrin who designed the basic cylinder playback apparatus to hitherto unprecedented exacting specifications.

The good counsel and advice of Philip L. Miller, who as Assistant Chief and later Chief (1959-1966) of The New York Public Library Music Division was responsible for the actual acquisition and care of the cylinders from H.B. Bretnall, Aida Favia-Artsay, and William H. Seltsam respectively, has been absolutely indispensable throughout every phase of the R & H Mapleson cylinder project.

When John Stratton prepared his report for R & H covering the 1967 inspection and inventory of the Mapleson cylinders, he had particularly in mind the locating of certain items from among the 98 delivered from Seltsam to The New York Public Library in the spring of 1962, almost all of those in point having been noted in the Ira Glackens 1938 Gramophone article, which stemmed from a first hearing by himself and George K. Bishop of the cylinders as they had come to Seltsam earlier that year from the Mapleson Estate. Among those cited by Stratton was an unpublished item from Jean de Reszke's 1901 Siegfried, a second Jean de Reszke-Milka Ternina Tristan cylinder (1901), two additional Lucia Mad Scene excerpts with Melba, two more Sembrich La Traviata bits (1903), two Carmen items with Calvé (1902), the Bénédiction des poignards from Les Huguenots with Adolph Mühlmann (1903), a Dich teure Halle from Tannhauser with Gadski, and above all, two other versions of the Faust final trio, these being in addition to the IRCC-published one with Calvé-Dippel-Journet (1902) and a version with partial encore from the New York Public Library 1939 batch of 12 that remained unpublished but available at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives for audition on tape done from a 1941 Library of Congress lacquer disc transfer. For better or worse, these cylinders remained unissued by IRCC.

The spring 1981 tape transfer project actually was not the first excursion by R & H into the unpublished Mapleson cylinder territory. The demonstration of early wax cylinder sound restoration given by Wilfried Zahn of the Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, Frankfurt in the course of the February 1978 annual meeting of the Association for Recorded Sound

Collections in Washington, D.C. was singularly impressive, with the result that Mr. Zahn was invited to try his hand with the published and with the two unpublished Faust final trio cylinders. Upon receiving cylinders and tape back from Germany late that summer, if we were not totally convinced in the direction of attempting a wholesale Mapleson cylinder transfer project in Germany, at least we felt we had made progress toward clearing up who was who, and when, on two out of the three unpublished Mapleson Faust final trio cylinders, the faintest being Melba-Albert-Saléza-Edouard de Reszke (1901) in the early part of the scene, the other unpublished one being Suzanne Adams-Albert Alvarez-Edouard de Reszke (1903). The sonics and balances fitted precisely the description given by Glackens in 1938.

What new discoveries were made in the course of the 1981 transfer project? Going down the line opera-by-opera, we find that the choral invocation to Brahma in the 1901 L'Africaine (with Plançon barely audible) is not the single brief bit issued on IRCC LP L-7004 but is rather the most immediately audible of three items, the first being another take of the choral fragment, down in pitch, and the third being a virtually inaudible and unidentifiable tenor solo. We soon found that Mapleson had used his cylinder machine just as we use our tape recorders today and that his erasures (read shaving) for purposes of re-use left much to be desired. Hence the sporadically encountered "over-dubs" and "double exposures". A real jolt came at the end of the Lucienne Bréval-Jean de Reszke Act IV duet from the same 1901 performance. Here we suddenly encounter Lionel Mapleson's two young children in animated dialogue, after which Lionel chimes in, "Hello Darling! We're in the library and the day is April 8, 1909. We've just come home from a very windy walk on Brooklyn Bridge -- Goodbye!" Needless to say, Tom Owen and myself almost fell off our chairs with surprise, not only at this sudden family vignette from the past with its startling human dimension, but the 1909 date coming hard-by a 1901 priceless operatic document. There are four other such family episodes, including not only the young father Lionel in fine fettle, but the children raising their voices in song -- Au clair de la lune, Onward Christian Soldiers, and an unidentified round. The fact that Lionel's son, Alfred, who succeeded his father as Met librarian in 1938, was born in 1905 would seem to indicate that all these family episodes were cut onto the ends of cylinders after 1903 when Lionel had ceased to record operatic performances.

From Aïda there are two new items from the Temple Scene, highlighting Marguerite Marilly as the Priestess and Marcel Journet as Ramfis. Then there is a stirring concerted bit from Act II where conflicting claims for doom and clemency for the Ethiopian prisoners are the immediate concern. While the chorus dominates, Gadske, Emilio de Marchi, Louise Homer, and Giuseppe Campanari are among the audible principals.

The Calvé Habanera from Carmen was evidently destroyed in one of the early IRCC transfer attempts so all we have of this redoubtable artist is her urging José at the end of Act II to join the smugglers in their great outdoor life. There is a bit of the bullring chorus episode

of Act IV, including the first bars of Escamillo's entrance. Unfortunately, no exact dating or casting information has been located -- the Escamillo could be either Journet or Scotti, to judge from the 1902 Metropolitan Opera Annals.

The popularity of Gounod's Faust at the Met led some wiseacres to dub it as the Faustspielshaus. Not surprisingly, there are 11 Faust cylinders, the new ones being the aforementioned unpublished final trio performances, to which can be added the end of the Waltz, the Soldiers' Chorus, the Act III Marguerite-at-the-window episode with Suzanne Adams, Albert Alvarez, and Edouard de Reszke. All these are from 1903, and this Marguerite scene does not compare either as performance or recording with the vivid Fritz Scheff-Thomas Salignac-Marcel Journet cylinder from the same year published on IRCC LP L-7028. A peculiarity of the famous Duel Scene cylinder with Alvarez, Campanarari, and Edouard de Reszke from February 18, 1903 (published on IRCC LP's L-7006 and L-7032) is that it had to be played back at well below our standard mandrel speed of 184 rpm to be amenable for final pitching. In discussing this by phone with John Stratton, he hazarded the guess that Mapleson slowed the speed in order to accommodate as much as possible of the whole scene.

In transferring the duet cylinder of Sembrich and Salignac from Donizetti's La fille du régiment, we encountered a delightful bit at the very end -- La Sembrich singing the final verse of Ardit's Parla vals with terrific brio. No dating could be located; but it could be from the February 9, 1902 Sunday night concert with Walter Damrosch conducting, where Sembrich is billed simply as offering "Songs (Selected)".

One of the more interesting aspects of working with all the extant Mapleson cylinders as a group was the opportunity offered to put items from the same performance together that had been published apart or simply passed up. In any event, the use of a standard 184 rpm mandrel speed enabled us to distinguish between the Nordica Götterdämmerung Immolation Scene performances of January 23 and February 28, 1903 respectively. They differ by a half-step when played back at the same speed. The 3-part version from February 28 was published by IRCC in 78 rpm format only. The 2-part version from January was divided between the original IRCC acquisition of 1938 and the 1939 New York Public Library group. IRCC issued only the Part 2 cylinder from the latter on its LP L-7015.

New in the group from Les Huguenots were two items from the Béné-diction des poignards, one with Journet from February 24, 1902, and the other with Adolph Muhlmann from January 24, 1903. The latter is of greater interest from the standpoint of soloist audibility. However, the greatest surprise apropos Les Huguenots stemmed not from the cylinder transfer operation but from this writer's documentation work during the summer, which included a visit to William Seltsam's close associate, George Laviolette, in Bridgeport, Connecticut. He, together with Glendon R. Good, were bequeathed the IRCC effects following Seltsam's death in 1967. Mr. Laviolette took the occasion of my visit to show me and

present to the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives a handwritten notebook listing with dates and casting (in all but a dozen or so instances) 120 cylinders that had been delivered to IRCC in early 1938 and including a detailed critique of each cylinder as heard on a small Edison machine. A quick phone call to Ira Glackens the next day confirmed that this was the original notebook prepared by George K. Bishop and himself and which had served as the basis of the November 1938 Mapleson Collection article in The Gramophone. I had not waited to call Mr. Glackens before sitting down at my dining room table to make a quick digest of the notebook. Upon coming to item #65 in the inventory, I noted the remark: "This is just an Orch. selection." Then crossed out immediately above, the notation "ADAMS - QUEEN ACT II (March 1, 1902)." I immediately remembered the John Stratton article in the BIRS Recorded Sound, July 1968, in which he not only cogently contested the long standing attribution of this cylinder of the Queen's "a ce mot" cabaletta to Melba, but opted for Suzanne Adams as the purveyor of this dazzling bit of vocal virtuosity. Surely there was no reason for Messrs. Bishop and Glackens to set down their notations out of thin air! Presumably, the "a ce mot" cylinder had become separated from its original container prior to the time Lionel Mapleson handed it over to Seltsam for experimentation in 1937. For this reason there is no description of the cylinder in the Bishop-Glackens inventory, since it had been obtained by Seltsam separate from the 120 delivered from the Mapleson Estate. So it seems that we may have solid proof here for Stratton's argument.

From Mapleson's documentation of Lohengrin, only four cylinders were ever published, the most famous being the two from Jean de Reszke's final appearance at the Metropolitan -- March 29, 1901. The more impressive was IRCC's -- with announcement by Mapleson -- published in 78 rpm format only, while the Herrold LP H-5000 had another brief bit taken from the Favia-Artsay group of Maplesons. An amusing discrepancy between the IRCC 78 rpm disc and the actual cylinder is that Mapleson's announcement occurs at the start of the disc, on the original cylinder, it comes at the end. In any event, Mapleson did a remarkably extended documentation of the February 7, 1903 Lohengrin with Gadske, Georg Anthes, Luise Reuss-Belce, Anton van Rooy, and Robert Blass. To the pair of cylinders published by IRCC, we can add eight more, including Lohengrin's arrival (minus Mein lieber Schwan), part of the King's Prayer, the Bridal Chorus, and much duet material with Gadske and Anthes.

From the Lucia di Lammermoor cylinders featuring Melba, we found the Verrano a te duet excerpt with Saléza, and like a number of other cylinders, it had to be held together with rubber bands and Scotch tape in order to achieve a complete playback, and at very low level to boot. The Mad Scene excerpt issued by IRCC is a March 18, 1901 concert version without chorus. We found the last part of the March 2 version, the same performance as that with the Saléza duet. This is with chorus, but at very low program level. The first part from this performance was evidently destroyed in the attempt at transfer by IRCC.

Together with Ero e Leandro by Met conductor-composer, Luigi Mancinelli, Paderewski's Manru (American premiere, February 14, 1902) seems

to have been one of the few novelties documented by Mapleson. Since the cylinder containing an episode between Manru and the gypsy girls in Act II, Scene 2 bore no identification, it took awhile to figure out what the music was; but a diligent search through scores of 1900-03 operatic novelties at the Met, plus a cross-check with a European broadcast tape of somewhat more recent vintage, enabled us to pinpoint the music and, from the Metropolitan Opera Annals, to identify the soprano as Fritz Scheff, thus adding one more bit of documentation for this fine artist who never chose to record commercially.

Among the first Mapleson tries at recording from the prompter's box was the cylinder of Melba in the Valse from Gounod's Roméo et Juliette on March 9, 1901; and he announces the occasion on the Library of Congress lacquer disc that survives from the 1941 disc transfer from which the cylinder emerged only in pieces. The second part of the performance, part of the IRCC group, never made it even to an initial transfer.

The March 19, 1901 Siegfried with Jean de Reszke is represented on IRCC LP L-7006 and L-7032 from two cylinders, which now is augmented by a rather muzzy one of the initial Nothing! apostrophe. A Georg Anthes bit from the latter part of the same Act I scene (January 19, 1903) shows Jean de Reszke on IRCC to decidedly better advantage, musically if not sonically. A fine example of the Mapleson inadvertent "double exposure" is revealed in the second cylinder from the Act II duet with Anthes and Nordica, wherein we get a good bit of the final apotheosis from Faust before Wagner assumes dominance (this is audible in the IRCC 78 rpm issue - 154 side A).

Tannhäuser never was represented in the published Mapleson cylinder repertoire; but now we have a fine one of Johanna Gadski in the latter part of Dich teure Halle (January 17, 1903) including Wolfram's offstage bit (Bispham) and Tannhauser's entrance (Emil Gerhäuser). Gerhäuser also is heard in the Act I Shepherd Boy scene from the same 1903 performance which also includes Carrie Bridewell.

The Mapleson documentation of Tosca with Emma Eames and Emilio de Marchi (the "creator" of Cavaradossi) stands among the more remarkable achievements of its kind (see IRCC LPs L 7004, L-7032). Yet Seltsam failed to include the Te Deum with Scotti which he had on hand, even though it was from a different 1903 performance than that issued on Herrold H-5000, which was from January 3 with Eames, de Marchi, and Scotti.

The Tristan und Isolde excerpts from 1901 with Milka Ternina and Jean de Reszke -- both on the same cylinder -- can only be described as a monumental disaster in terms of program content versus noise (the only other cylinder -- from Act I -- was destroyed in an early IRCC transfer effort). The original IRCC 78 rpm issue (#216) offers more audibility (and precious little at that) than the original cylinder in its current state. A Tristan cylinder that met disintegration during the 1941 Library of Congress transfer operation for The New York Public Library

did get its program content preserved intact on a lacquer disc, albeit with a resounding crack throughout (eliminated electronically, thanks to Packburn); and the result is that the George Anthes-Lillian Nordica Tristan Love Duet may now be heard in three parts rather than in just the two published as IRCC LP L-7006/L-7032 from the February 9, 1903 performance.

Some of the more interesting and for the present more insoluble precise dating problems with respect to the Mapleson cylinders center around the documentation of Die Walküre, chiefly from 1903 performances with Nordica, Gadschi, and Bispham among others. All three of the published cylinder transfers -- two on IRCC, one on Herrold H-5000 -- overlap musically by a few bars, indicating separate performance dates; and regrettably no slips or annotated containers are on hand to pinpoint dates, though casting of the Valkyrie maidens tended to remain constant for a given season. An oddity of the Wotan's Farewell with David Bispham from February 21, 1903 is an apparent "cut" which make no sense musically. However, if one listens carefully to various of the original cylinders, one can hear the starts and stops of Mapleson's machine as he skips from one section to another of a given episode. This happens, for example, in the Faust Soldiers' Chorus and in the January 23, 1903 Nordica Götterdämmerung Immolation Scene, just to cite a few typical examples. Musical cuts, freely indulged in at the Metropolitan Opera of that day, present yet more vexing problems for those of us involved in accurate documentation of what actually is on the Mapleson cylinders.

There are 15 Mapleson cylinder bits that do not stem from operatic stage performances at the Met, among which we have mentioned the Sembrich excerpt from Ardit's Parla vals. We also have Sembrich in March of 1900 cooperating with Mapleson at the very beginning of his experiments, doing the cadenza from the Johann Strauss Voices of Spring unaccompanied (published on IRCC LP L-7015, L-7032). Then there is Suzanne Adams in the January 12, 1902 Sunday night concert, Damrosch conducting, in the Printemps - Valse chantée by her 'cellist husband, Leo Stern. We managed to extract rather more than the "few faint murmurs" referred to in the Glackens 1938 Gramophone article.

A funeral cortege involving male chorus and wind band, as well as four solo piano cylinders recorded in 1902 by Met Opera rehearsal pianist Carl Müller, remain for the present unidentified in any meaningful detail. There are orchestral bits, including excerpts from Delibes' Coppélia and Sylvia, and the final section of Saint-Saëns' Danse macabre, which we suspect are from early 1904, at which point it appears that Mapleson was enjoined from recording actual operatic performances. (Some say that things began dropping onto the stage from the catwalk where he recorded after 1901, while others imply complaints from the commercial record companies who were beginning to appreciate the profit potential of the Met superstars of the day).

We referred, in connection with the "a cet mot" cylinder from Les Huguenots, to the George Bishop-Ira Glackens notebook itemizing and for



the most part dating and casting the 120 cylinders delivered to William H. Seltsam's International Record Collectors' Club from the Mapleson Estate. This has proven to be a veritable Rosetta Stone in terms of being able to account for all the Mapleson cylinders brought to light in the period 1937-1959. We know that the two independently unearthed groups acquired by The New York Public Library in 1939 (12) and by Aida Favia-Artsay in 1958 (10) totaled 22 cylinders in all. If we add to this the 120 delivered to Seltsam from the Mapleson Estate in 1938, plus the two lent him by Mapleson previously, we come up with a total of 144. Thus we have 24, the most important of which have already been cited, that were lost or broken during the first attempt by IRCC to achieve successful disc transfer. Seltsam's associate, George Laviolette, has described to this writer his memories of brittle cylinders literally exploding on the mandrel -- sic transit gloria mundi!

We have concentrated primarily on the musical and documentary findings encountered in the course of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives Mapleson Cylinder Project. What about the physical state of the cylinders themselves? Backstage at the Opera, a 1937 book of reminiscences by Rose Heylbut and Aimée Gerber, the latter a Met "paymaster" since the turn of the century, describes the Mapleson collection and notes that constant playing by Mapleson and his colleagues have left them as but faint replicas of their former glory. The Bishop-Glackens notebook, as well as the November 1937 Gramophone piece by Glackens, bemoans the thunderous surface noise on the cylinders.

The years intervening between 1938 and 1981 have not improved the state of the Mapleson cylinders in terms of amenability to transfer to tape or any other more permanent medium; but what did come out of the 1981 Rodgers and Hammerstein transfer operation was the clear realization that the earlier wear-and-tear from playback "with a rusty nail" did far more damage than whatever internal, chemical stresses may have caused in the way of added surface noise and fragility.

No technological miracles were accomplished in terms of reducing surface noise: this could be done only at the expense of adulterating musical information. What was accomplished in terms of applied electro-acoustic technology was the elimination of spurious rumble elements and above all, most transient noise -- cracks, clicks, pops, etc. Rather than attempt to eliminate noise by cutting off the upper end of the frequency spectrum, every effort was made to utilize this part of the audible range to capture vocal timbre and to provide a modicum of depth cue, especially in such items as the big scenes in Aida and Die Walküre. For obvious reasons, the most successful Maplesons as sheer sound are the big choral scenes, such as the close of Die Meistersinger where the inherent program level was able to over-ride surface noise factors. The more "off mike" the performers, the more trying on the ears the battle between audible program content and all-too-audible surface noise. In listening to and living with the tape transfers of the Mapleson cylinders, one learns to attune the ear to disregard much of the noise

element -- and this is aided vastly by headphone listening as against loudspeaker audition.

Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives Sound Engineer Tom Owen is publishing in detailed information regarding the technical fine points of wax cylinder transfer learned from the Mapleson Cylinder Project; and this writer likewise will be publishing or will cause to be published far more detailed information on the Mapleson cylinders and their contents and provenance than appears in this preliminary report. Meanwhile we expect by the end of 1981 to be able to have available for researchers at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound a full set of carefully programmed tapes attesting to what we have extracted from the cylinders by way of audible and meaningful information, this together with the fullest possible background documentation; and we have every hope that some form of public issue from these tapes will be available in time for the Metropolitan Opera Centennial year of 1983, thus providing a living link between the usable past and the immediately sentient present.

Despite the findings outlined here, there remain many questions to be answered with respect to the history and provenance of the Mapleson cylinders: Did Lionel Mapleson, being a librarian the whole of his professional life, ever compile a list of his wax cylinder recordings? If so, what became of it? Where is the correspondence between Mapleson and Thomas A. Edison concerning design of diaphragms and the special outsized horn used for live performance recordings at the Met? What truth is there to Alfred Mapleson's assertion that the best of the cylinders were sent by Lionel to his mother in England where they were destroyed by the climate? If, as asserted by Alfred in a phone conversation with this writer, many of the cylinders other than those at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives were given away or sold at \$1 each, who besides the mysterious H.B. Bretnall of Brooklyn acquired them? Are there any surviving? All efforts at this writing to come up with definitive answers to these, as well as to pin down doubtful attributions to certain of the more important cylinders -- the O noble lame from Le Cid attributed to Jean de Reszke as published by IRCC on LP L-7015, the casting of the unpublished Faust final trio with partial encore from the New York Public Library group -- are tentative. Here are challenges for future researchers in a singularly fascinating area in the history of recorded sound.