

DISCOVERIES

("Discoveries" is a new feature of the **ARSC Journal**, and I hope it will appear in each issue. It is a forum in which readers can tell of their research findings, particularly those that do not require treatment in a full-scale article: lost recordings found again, mistaken identities corrected, new ways to get the most and best sound out of old records, biographical details about the pioneers of recorded sound--whatever, provided only that it pertains to the concerns of ARSC, that it is factual, and that it is news. Submissions may be as short as a paragraph and should not run more than three double-spaced typed pages.--J.W.N.F.)

About Some of HMV's La Scala Opera Recordings

Beginning early in the century, His Master's Voice made a series of complete opera recordings in Milan, using soloists of greater or lesser celebrity (usually lesser), the chorus of La Scala, and from 1926 on the La Scala Orchestra as well. Some 26 complete sets were recorded between 1907 and 1932 led by HMV's Italian house conductor, Carlo Sabajno, who on the evidence of his many records was a capable, energetic, and useful musician. Sabajno remains a bit of a mystery man: little is known of his life (see **ARSC Journal** XIV:2 (1982), p. 76), and nowadays only veteran vocal record collectors are likely to be familiar with his work.

It turns out, however, that an even more obscure conductor was working in the shadow of this shadowy figure. In the recording sheets that report the Milan branch's work to the London home office, Gino Nastrucci begins to appear as conductor in 1929. Apparently he was Sabajno's deputy. He first turns up conducting one side of the complete *Tosca* starring Carmen Melis, Piero Pauli, and Apollo Granforte: No. 21, "Io tenni la promessa" (matrix CM1235-3--the suffix "-3" signifies take 3), recorded November 19, 1929. Sabajno had conducted the previous takes of this side and all the other published matrices; for some reason Nastrucci stood in for him at that one session. Nastrucci's next contribution is to *La Traviata* in 1930, with Anna Rosza, Alessandro Ziliani, and Otello Borgonovo; he conducts sides 7-8, "E strano!...Ah! fors'è lui" (CF3683-5) and "Follie!...Sempre libera" (CF3682-2), as well as No. 5, "Un dì felice eterea" (CF3678-4), and No. 15 "Ah, vive sol quel core" (CF3599-1, also dubbed by Victor as 69273-1R). Sabajno had recorded the rest of the opera on October 27-29, 1930, and Nastrucci was assigned to do the mopping up in November and December.

Indeed, it appears that October 29 was the date of Sabajno's last recording session that fall, at least as pertains to HMV's complete opera projects, for he conducted only two published sides of the overlapping *Il Trovatore*: No. 6, "Tace la notte" with Granforte and Aureliano Pertile (matrix CF3552-1), recorded at the first session on October 24, and No. 8, "Vedi le fosche" with Minghini-Cattaneo (matrix CF3575-1), recorded October 29. The next day Nastrucci took over and in fact he conducted all the remaining 28 sides, recorded from October 30

to the end of the **Trovatore** sessions on November 26. I've heard this set criticized as sluggish, and it never did sound much like Sabajno's work; now we know why.

Nastrucci also lent a hand with **Carmen**--eight of the 38 sides are his, those with matrices 2F337, 2F375/80 and 2F382, containing segments of the last three acts and recorded in May 1931. He conducts three sides of **Otello**: No. 6, the beginning of the love duet with Maria Carbone and Nicola Fusati (2M182-4), and Nos. 28-29, the willow song (2M380-1) and "Ave Maria" (2M181-3) with Carbone, all recorded in February 1932. But the **Don Pasquale** of September and October 1932 appears to have been all Sabajno's work.

The reports don't say what made the substitutions necessary, and my work did not require me to find out. Maybe Sabajno's health was failing; he died in 1934. Nor is it apparent why HMV did not assign credit where it was due--the Nastrucci **Il Trovatore** seems always to have been publicized and packaged as Sabajno's, though some of the labels for the Victor 78s name no conductor at all. Could it be that after two decades and more of hard labor in the Milan studios, Sabajno had actually gained a following in his own right? Or were there contractual reasons? Perhaps there's a Sabajno specialist out there who can direct some light into this obscure corner.

Thanks to Peter Higgins and John Watson at the EMI International Office, and Ruth Edge at the EMI archives, for assisting my research into the firm's opera recordings, and to Michael Gray for introducing me to them.

John W. N. Francis