

of historic reissues and the fine technical work Ward Marston has performed for several other labels, this is an eagerly anticipated edition. Since Koch has recently replaced Qualiton Imports as the U.S. distributor for the Pearl recordings, they have no justification for continuing the sale of the Bayer anthology.

Pearl has not claimed this to be a "complete" release of Caruso's recordings, but twelve CDs would indicate that nearly all of the known recordings will be included. It is possible that a few of the alternate takes issued by RCA on ARM4-0302 will not appear in the Pearl collection, since RCA apparently has the only existing copies of some of these items.

It is probably not possible for any single record company to issue an absolutely complete collection of the 245 extant recordings of Enrico Caruso. RCA's LP collection of Caruso's complete recordings was never actually finished, with Volumes 1, 2, and 3 failing to see the light of day. Had they been issued, the first three volumes would have contained all of the Milan recordings plus the 1904/1905 Victors with piano accompaniment. Perhaps the Soundstream digital process used on the remaining thirteen volumes was found to be an unsatisfactory process for the very early recordings. It is also possible that RCA was unable to obtain satisfactory copies of some rare items. This writer was not satisfied with the sound of any of the Soundstream-processed Caruso recordings, and it would appear that RCA has abandoned this system.

An expertly transferred complete Caruso edition is long overdue. Especially needed are CD transfers of all the 1902-1904 Milan recordings, with sound up to the standards Keith Hardwick has provided on the EMI Milan CD, but also containing the two G&Ts, six Zonophones and one AICC cylinder not included on that disc. Hopefully, the forthcoming Pearl edition will come close to attaining this goal. At that time, a review reflecting on the recorded legacy of this legendary singer will be most appropriate, rather than an essay such as this, which must devote so much space to documenting the inadequacies of a poorly produced collection. In the meantime, Koch and OASI should cease selling the Bayer edition, a collection that does a substantial injustice to the memory of a singer who is arguably the greatest Italian tenor in the history of sound recording. *Reviewed by Gary Galo*

NOTES:

- ¹ Sokol, Martin. "The Pre-Victor Recordings of Enrico Caruso," *Antique Phonograph Monthly*. 5:4 (1977).
- ² Bolig, Dr. John R. "A Caruso Discography." In *The Great Caruso* by Michael Scott. pp. . Alfred A. Knopf, 1988. (Note: this discography contains several corrections and additions to the material Dr. Bolig included in his book *The Recordings of Enrico Caruso*, The Eldridge Reeves Johnson Memorial, Delaware State Museum, (1973). Among the corrections are the dates of the Milan recordings).
- ³ Galo, Gary A. "Caruso: The Unpublished Recordings of ARM4-0302 and the Question of Authenticity." *Antique Phonograph Monthly*. 7 No. 9 (1984).
- ⁴ Favia-Artsay, Aida. *Caruso on Records*. The Historic Record, (1965).

Beniamino Gigli Live Recordings 1935-1955.

Legato Classics LCD-106-1 (1 CD: AAD) n.d. Playing time: 72:35

From the film *Ave Maria* (1936): Verdi: *Il Trovatore*: "Di quella pira;" [?]: "Maria, ti voglio tanto bene;" Humperdinck: *Hänsel und Gretel*: "Ne bosco uometto;" Melichar: "Anima mia;" Verdi: *La Traviata* "[Ah sì,] da un anno . . . Un dì felice" (with Erna

Berger, soprano); Verdi: *La Traviata*: “Invitato a qui seguirmi . . . Ogni suo aver tal femmina” (with Erna Berger, soprano); Medley: Bach-Gounod: *Ave Maria* . . . [?]: “Maria, ti voglio tanto bene”/from the film *Mama* (1940); Verdi: *Otello*: “Dio, mi potevi”/from the film *Du Bist Mein Gluck* (1936); Becce: “Tu sei la vita mia;” Puccini: *Manon Lescaut*: “Donna non vidi mai;” Puccini: *Manon Lescaut*: “Ah! non v’ avvicinate . . . Guardate, pazzo son”/Live performance, Teatro alla Scala, Milan, April 8, 1938; Massenet: *Manon*: “O dolce incanto” (w. Pia Tassinari, soprano)/Live performance, Teatro Reale, Rome March 30, 1939; Cileà: *Adriana Lecouvreur*: “La dolcissima effige” (w. Magda Olivero, soprano)/from the film *Ridi Pagliacci* (1942); Millocher: “Valzer della fortuna [sic]/from the film *Non ti scordar di me* (1935); Senatra-Schubert-Melichor: “Mille Cherubini in coro” [arrangement of Schubert’s Op. 92, No. 2]; De Curtis: “Non ti scordar di me”/from the film *Mama* (1940); Bixio: “Se vuoi goder la vita;” Bixio: “Mama”/from the film *Solo per te* (1938); De Curtis: “Ti voglio tanto bene”/from the film *Ave Maria* (1936); Bach-Gounod: “Ave Maria”/Live concert, London, November 26, 1947; Mascagni: *Cavalleria Rusticana*: “O Lola ch’ ai di latti la cammisa” (Siciliana)/Live concert, London, April 2, 1953; Pietri: *Maristella*: “Io conosco un giardino”/Live concert, London, March 8, 1954; Brahms: *Wiegenlied*, Op. 49, No. 4/Live concert, Carnegie Hall, New York, April 20, 1954; Wagner: *Lohengrin*: *Merce, cigno gentil* [Mein lieber Schwann]/Live concert, Carnegie Hall, New York, April 20, 1954; Guarini-Caccini: “Amarilli, mia bella;” Di Capua: “O sole mio.”

While there is much to praise in this new offering from Legato (Lyric Distribution), there also are a number of distracting blemishes.

First, it is difficult to understand the title given to this collection, as only eight of the 26 items (roughly 30 percent) are actually “live” performances. Surely, film soundtracks are as much studio creations as commercial recordings, regardless of whether the singer is strutting about a stage or not. One tends to think of “live” performances as recorded directly from a stage or concert platform. Perhaps the title, *Beniamino Gigli Live Recordings and Soundtracks 1935-1955* would have been closer to the mark.

Second, the documentation is spotty in places. Sources are often incomplete: the London recitals (items 21-23) are dated precisely, but their locations are not given. Names of supporting players—the Captain in the *Manon Lescaut* harbor scene, for example—are omitted. Conductors are not named, where they possibly could have been traced. Accompanists, too, are left anonymous. Mention of Dino Fedri, pianist for Gigli’s Carnegie Hall recitals, appears nowhere in the notes. Even composition credits are muddled: no composer is given for “Maria, ti voglio tanto” which appears twice in the collection, though admittedly this reviewer could not track down its composer either. The “Mille Cherubini in coro” is credited in the notes to Schubert, but this is actually an arrangement of the composer’s Op. 92, No. 2. “Wiegenlied.” Contemporary HMV catalogs cite “[Alois] Melichar-Schubert” for Gigli’s 1935 commercial recording of it, while Victor catalogs list “Senatra-Schubert-Melichar.” Also be warned that “Valzer della Fortuna” appears as “Valzer della felicità” in the Cronstrom and Ricaldone discographies for Gigli’s 1943 commercial recording, and as “Glückswalzer” by Bennett. “Ne bosco ce uometto” is in fact “Ein Männlein steht im Walde” from Act II of *Hänsel und Gretel*, though no mention of the opera is made.

It is not overly critical to insist that the proper citation for operatic excerpts is the text as sung, rather than simply the names of major arias or ensembles. This reviewer has supplied such information for the *Traviata* duets and the *Manon Lescaut* "Guardate" in the listing above.

Determination of film dates is another matter, deserving a great deal more sympathy. While the filmographic information above has been corrected as much as possible, it is subject to a maze of inconsistencies in the literature, owing to a lack of copyright information and the carelessness with which dates of filming, original release, and international release are so often intermixed. "Ridi Pagliacci" (released as "Lache Bajazzo" with German dialogue, and "Laugh, Pagliacci" with English subtitles over Italian dialogue) was produced in Rome in 1942. The date of 1947, given in the program notes, corresponds to its postwar foreign release. "Du bist mein Gluck," which also appeared under the title "Tu sei la vita mia," was filmed in Munich in June 1936 according to Gigli's 1957 autobiography, not in 1940 as listed in the program notes (the film was released in the United States in 1936 and again in 1940). "Non ti scordar di me" (dated correctly) was a 1935 Italian production, released two years later in Britain by Korda as "Forget-Me-Not," and in America by Grand National as "Forever Yours." *Ave Maria* was filmed in Berlin in May 1936. It is time for an accurate, comprehensive Gigli filmography to appear!

As to sources, the Carnegie Hall excerpts (items 24-26) have been lifted from the commercial LPs (Victor LM 1972, HMV ALP 1329 in the U.K.). The *Adriana Lecouvreur* duet with Olivero may be the well-known live version found on EJS 357 (there is an unmistakable LP tick on the CD transfer), in which case it is Teatro Reale, Rome, March 20, 1940 under Rossi, not March 30, 1939 as listed in the notes—but this reviewer does not have both to compare. A real curiosity is the Bach-Gounod "Ave Maria" (item 20), which is identical to the commercial HMV issue conducted by Melichar (matrix ORA-1309-2, recorded in Berlin on May 24 1935, and originally issued as DA 1488 and Victor 1786). The CD transfer plays perfectly in sync when cued to the original 78. This means that a) the CD dubbing is not taken from the soundtrack of "Ave Maria;" b) the soundtrack performance was the one released commercially, which is unlikely, as ORA-1309-2 shows no signs of being a dubbing; or c) the commercial recording was used on the original soundtrack, possibly along with other titles from these Berlin HMV sessions that appeared in the film.

Sloppy documentation has plagued collectors' reissues since the earliest days of the LP, from which it can only be concluded that the worst traditions are likely to survive the longest. The compilers, like countless others before them, have mistaken their audience for casual listeners, when in fact most vocal collectors care as much about the origin of the materials as they do about the quality of their presentation. The culminating blow is the CD's lack of a copyright statement (and date)—good news for today's pirates, bad news for tomorrow's discographers.

On the plus side, the quality of the transfers is adequate considering the sources that probably were used. In many cases it is more than satisfactory, certainly a tremendous improvement over the LPs that have previously included these excerpts. Gigli enthusiasts with fresh memories of the Scala and EJS dubbings will be impressed with the distillation of the voice from the worn optical soundtracks, and the relatively few splices that disturb the flow of the performances. Some supplementary equalization is recommended, however. Besides a few rough starts, most of the

excerpts are presented as reasonably complete as might be expected. One constant source of irritation, as the program notes warn, is the dialogue that pops up intermittently over the music. But the only solution to this would have been to edit the music, which would have been unacceptable. Transfer speeds are inconsistent. While the chosen keys appear to be correct (except perhaps the opening “Di quella pira,” offered here at score pitch!), few are precisely pitched.

Like most opera stars, Gigli often was forced to grapple on screen with a light-weight repertory. Accordingly, a good portion of this CD—perhaps too much of it—is devoted to popular song. Gigli never “sang down” to this music as so many operatic singers do today, which may account for his unparalleled success in this corner of the repertory. Although his treatment of these ditties was always effective, he was never able, through sheer force of artistry or a natural sense of refinement, to fully effect their transformation into “art”—in the manner of McCormack. He tended more often to descend to the level of the material performed, oblivious to the more attractive option of doing otherwise. Hence the nickel-and-dime emoting we frequently encounter, and the countless other vulgarities that serve his detractors so well. But the voice—as nearly flawless as any in this century—always makes the necessary amends. When the songs are as good as Melichar’s haunting “Anima mia” or the charming titles by Bixio and De Curtis, the singer glows; when they are not, even he is at odds to make much of them.

Yet, we can be thankful for the many splendid operatic excerpts that did make their way into his films. Several of these gems are included in this collection, many of which he did not record commercially, such as the *Traviata* “Scena della borsa,” the *Adriana Lecouvreur* duet, and perhaps best of all, the “Dio, mi potevi” from *Otello*, a role, moreover, that was not in the tenor’s repertory. One only wishes that the compilers had included the “Esultate” from the 1938 film *Giuseppe Verdi*. The *Traviata* duet with Berger (performed here with chorus but without Flora and Gastone) is a nice addition to what survives of Gigli’s Alfredo, and the pairing of the two singers is delightful. Regrettably, the last page of their “Un di felice” is obscured by dialogue. The *Lecouvreur* “La dolcissima effige” has not been transferred well, nor is the performance impressive. Gigli’s reading of Otello’s A-flat Lament might not topple the pedestals that other well-known versions have long occupied, but the “Ma, pianto odoul” section further on is simply glorious, comparable to Melchior’s 1930 Berlin recording.

This CD is certainly not an ideal first sampling of Gigli, nor is it especially suitable as a token item in a collection otherwise unsympathetic to him. The 1988 Angel/EMI compilation of “golden age” commercial material (CDH 7 61051 2) would be more appropriate to meet these needs. But for those of us whose appetite for Gigli is insatiable for one reason or another, *Beniamino Gigli Live Recordings 1935-1955* is very much recommended in spite of its deceptive title and modest documentation. A bit more space might have been devoted to opera, but the choice of material was probably the result of what was available, hence the eight selections from “Ave Maria.” Better transfers of the soundtracks will only be possible when better prints of the films are located, but considering how unlikely this is, and how ridiculous it would be to wait for them, we should be thankful that the compilers have taken a first step in making some of this material available again, and better still, on compact disc. Clearly a case of something being better than nothing. *Reviewed by William Shaman*