

**Verdi. *Requiem***

Maria Caniglia, soprano; Ebe Stignani, mezzo-soprano; Beniamino Gigli, tenor; Ezio Pinza, bass; Chorus and Orchestra of the Rome Opera, Tullio Serafin, conductor. Recorded August 1939. Angel/EMI CDH 7 63341 2 (1 CD).

EMI's reissue of this classic performance of Giuseppe Verdi's *Requiem* is part of a series devoted to the recordings of Beniamino Gigli, including his eight complete operas. This is clearly a soloists' *Requiem*, and rarely has such a distinguished cast been assembled for this work. For many vocal collectors, Gigli has been the primary reason for owning this recording. Few tenors have sung with greater ease of production and mastery of breath control. Yet it is understandable why his performance has not met with universal acclaim. By this point in his career (he was 49 years old at the time) Gigli had developed a number of mannerisms and affectations which often disturb those who prefer the controlled intensity of Martinelli or Bjoerling. Gigli's sobs, portamenti and aspirations, such as "Ho-ho-ho-hostias" in the *Offertorio*, are not suited necessarily to sacred music. However, Verdi's *Requiem* is not necessarily a purely sacred composition. It is a highly dramatic, even theatrical masterpiece which cannot be judged or categorized by the same criteria applied to Brahms or Berlioz.

Gigli's colleagues, by contrast, epitomize vocal nobility, particularly Pinza and Stignani. Pinza's rich, velvety voice was ideally suited to this music. Even in the most dramatic passages, such as the "Confutatis maledictis," Pinza sang with unflinching line and beauty of tone, while never sounding under-powered. Stignani remains one of the great Verdi mezzo-sopranos of the century, perhaps surpassed only by Giulietta Simionato in sheer vocal richness and power. Stignani and Pinza ably demonstrate that the easier the production and the lighter the breath support, the more powerful the tone will be, if the voice has been properly trained and developed. Only Maria Caniglia fails to measure up to the vocal standards of her time, singing consistently flat above the staff. Tullio Serafin understood the operatic qualities of this work, particularly its stylistic kinship with *Aida*. Serafin was an ideal singer's conductor, and few others have allowed their soloists to achieve such consistent *bel canto* throughout. Yet, he raises the orchestra and chorus to levels of tremendous excitement in the more dramatic choral passages. The Rome forces, both chorally and orchestrally, are rather unpolished but their technical shortcomings do not detract from this remarkable performance.

The technical quality of this reissue, unfortunately, is well below the level of the performance. Although Keith Hardwick is credited as having transferred the original 78s to tape, this recording does not resemble his previous work in any way. In fact, it appears that two entirely different transfers of the originals were pieced together for this CD. This reviewer owns the original 78 rpm set and was able to refer to them for comparison. Some portions of this release are much more reverberant than others, either due to the use of two different equalizations or the addition of artificial reverb to one set of transfers. There is actually a splice between these two transfers near the end of the "Ingemisco." Gigli is surrounded by an acoustic resembling the originals for most of the aria, but at the phrase beginning "Statuens in parte dextra" there is an audible splice, and the sound becomes extremely reverberant. The "Ingemisco" is complete on a single 78 rpm side, with no such change in the character of the sound from beginning to end. What possible reason could the engineers have had for splicing to a different transfer before the 78 side was complete?

Another bad tape edit actually has resulted in the removal of one beat of music. Just before Gigli sings “Kyrie eleison”, where the full chorus follows the basses singing “luceat eis,” one beat of music has been excised, resulting in a measure of 3/4 time in this 4/4 section. What is more difficult to understand is the fact that this splice does not occur where 78 Sides 1 and 2 are joined. The missing beat has been removed a full two measures before the end of Side 1.

EMI has used the Cedar Audio Restoration Process on this reissue. Whether or not the somewhat muffled high frequencies are due to Cedar, or to another problem with these transfers is unknown. Keith Hardwick has produced many truly outstanding reissues for EMI. Bruno Walter’s 1935 Act I of *Die Walküre*, with Lauritz Melchior, Lotte Lehmann, and Emanuel List, sounds absolutely astonishing on the EMI CD (CDH 7 61020 2); it nearly qualifies as a high fidelity recording. Mr. Hardwick undoubtedly prepared at least some of the disc-to-tape transfers for the Verdi *Requiem*. However, something went very seriously wrong between his work and the final production of this CD. One can only hope that this is not a preview of future EMI reissues. *Reviewed by Gary A. Galo*

### Simon Barere at the Carnegie Hall

Transcription disc recordings of works on Carnegie Hall recitals given by Simon Barere on: (a) May 17, 1946; (b) November 18, 1946; (c) March 9, 1947; (d) November 11, 1947; (e) February 7, 1949; (f) Date unknown. Previously unpublished recordings marked with an asterisk (\*). Appian Publications & Recordings.

Volume One: CDAPR 7007 (2 CDs). Liszt: Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-flat major (a\*, with David Brockman conducting unnamed orchestra); *Sonetto 104 del Petrarca* (c\*); Sonata in B minor (d); *Rapsodie espagnole* (c); *Gnomenreigen* (e\*); *Valse de l'opéra Faust* (e\* & b\*); *Funérailles* (c); *Gnomenreigen* (b\*); *Hungarian Rhapsody* No. 12 in C-sharp minor (c\*). Volume Two: CDAPR 7008 (2 CDs). J. S. Bach: Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, BWV 903 (b\*); Schumann: Toccata in C major, Op. 7 (b); *Phantasiestücke*, Op. 12 No. 7: *Traumes Wirren* (d); Weber: Piano Sonata No. 1 in C major—Finale (Presto) (d\*); Godowsky: *Renaissance*: No. 8 (Pastorale after Corelli), No. 12 (Gigue after Loillet), No. 6 (Tambourin after Rameau) (d\*); Blumenfeld: Etude for the Left Hand (d); Glazunov: Etude in C major, Op. 31, No. 1 (b\*); Scriabin: Etudes in D-flat major, Op. 8, No. 10 (c) and in D-sharp minor, Op. 8, No. 12 (d); Rachmaninoff: Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18 (f\*, with unnamed conductor and orchestra); Preludes in G-sharp minor, Op. 32, No. 12, and in G minor, Op. 23, No. 5 (c); *Polka de W.R.* (d); Balakirev: *Islamey* (d).

Among the much sought piano treasures of the early LP era are the four Remington recordings featuring the playing of the legendary virtuoso Simon Barere (1896-1951). Although Remington’s publicity at the time and the reputation of the recordings has never concealed the fact, it is perhaps worth emphasizing that only the first two of those discs (199-17 and 199-35) contained studio recordings made by Barere explicitly for Remington. The pianist had signed an exclusive contract with Remington that was terminated abruptly by Barere’s tragically sudden death during a public performance of the Grieg Concerto at Carnegie Hall on April 2, 1951. Remington issued the second disc of the commercially-made recordings as a *Memorial Album*, but was reluctant to abandon this potentially profitable relationship. Consequently, upon learning that the pianist’s son Boris had had acetate recordings made