

2. **Verdi:** *Aida:* O patria mia (Dec. 5, 1923); Ritorna vincitor (2 takes - Dec. 5 & 11, 1923); Pur tu riveggo...La tra foreste 11 vergine ("Nile Scene"; w/Giovanni Martinelli, tenor, Feb. 7, 1924); La fatal pietra ("Tomb Scene"; w/Martinelli, 2 takes - Feb. 8, 1924); O terra addio (w/Martinelli, Feb. 8, 1924); *Ernani:* Ernani, involami (2 takes - Dec. 5, 1923 & Jan. 23, 1924); *La Forza del Destino:* Pace, pace, mio Dio (3 takes - Dec. 11, 1923 & Jan. 23, 1924). *Otello:* Pinagea cantando nell'erma landa (Jan. 23, 1924); Ave maria (Jan. 23, 1924); **Scott:** Lullaby (Feb. 8, 1924); **Brahms:** Wiegenlied (Feb. 8, 1924); **Shelley:** Love's Sorrow (April 11, 1924); **Tosti:** Good-bye (2 takes - April 11, 1924); Serenade (2 takes - April 12, 1924); **Monro-Higgins:** My Lovely Celia (April 11, 1924); **De Curtis:** Carmè (April 11, 1924); **Di Capua:** Maria, Mari! (April 11, 1924); **Ponchielli:** *La Gioconda:* Suicidio! (2 takes - Jan. 14, 1925); **Meyerbeer:** *L'Africana:* In grembo a me (2 takes - Jan. 14, 1925); **Hewett:** The Little Old Garden (June 1, 1925); **Bland:** Carry me Back to Old Virginny (June 2, 1925); A Perfect Day (June 3, 1925); **Foster:** My Old Kentucky Home (June 2, 1925); Old Folks at Home (2 takes - June 4, 1925); **Bishop:** Home Sweet Home (June 3, 1925); **Dupont:** La Rosita (June 4, 1925); **Nevin:** The Rosary (June 5, 1925); **Di Chiara:** La Spagnola (June 5, 1925); **Silberta:** Beloved (June 5, 1925)
3. **Verdi:** *Aida:* La fatal pietra...O terra addio (w/Martinelli, May 17, 1926); Ritorna vincitor (2 takes - May 20, 1926 & Jan 18, 1928); O patria mia (May 20, 1926); *Ernani:* Ernani, involami (2 takes - June 16, 1927 & Jan. 17, 1928); *La Forza del Destino:* Pace, pace, mio Dio (2 takes - Jan. 17, 1928); Io muoi!...Non imprecare, umiliati (2 takes - Jan. 18, 1928); La vergine degli angeli (w/Ezio Pinza, bass, Jan. 23, 1928); *Il Trovatore:* Miserere (2 takes - w/Martinelli, Jan. 23, 1928); **Spontini:** *La Vestale:* Tu che invoco (May 18, 1926); O nume tutelar (2 takes - May 18, 1926); **Bellini:** *Norma:* Sedziose voci...Casta diva...Ah! bello a me ritorna (Jan. 30, 1929 & Dec. 31, 1928); Mira, o Norma (w/Marion Telva, contralto, Jan. 30, 1929); **Tosti:** 'A vucchella (May 18, 1926); Luna d'estate (May 18, 1926); Serenade (June 2, 1927); Good-bye (June 13, 1927); **Massenet:** Élégie (2 takes - May 19, 1926); **Bach-Gounod:** Ave Maria (May 19, 1926); **Schubert:** Ständchen (w/C. Ponselle - June 19, 1926); **Kahn:** Ave Maria (June 16, 1927); **Dvorak:** Songs My Mother Taught Me (Jan. 17, 1928); **Rubinstein:** Since I First Met Thee (Jan. 17, 1928)
4. Hines, Jerome. *Great Singers on Great Singing.* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1984)
5. Ponselle, Rosa and James A. Drake. *Ponselle - A Singers Life.* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1982)
- 6 & 7. Ponselle and Drake.
8. Park, Bill. "Discography" in *Ponselle - A Singer's Life.* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1982)
- 9 & 10. Ponselle and Drake.
11. Seltsam, William. *Metropolitan Opera Annals.* New York: H. Wilson & Company, 1947)
12. Ponselle and Drake.

Vienna State Opera "Live" Edition, 1933-1944 - Excerpts.¹ Koch Schwann 3-1450-2.

This single disc sampler contains highlights from an incredibly ambitious project by Koch International. Between 1933 and 1944 Vienna State Opera sound engineer Hermann May made a substantial number of recordings during live performances, capturing some of the most important singers and conductors of that era. The recordings were made with a single microphone fed to a non-professional disc recording apparatus. The recording medium seems to have depended on availability, and consisted of sheets coated with wax, gelatine or similar materials. Recording time was limit-

ed to around five minutes, so most of the selections are extremely short. May did attempt to record more lengthy portions of operas, including some complete scenes and acts. Unfortunately, he did not have two recording machines at his disposal, so some of these "complete" recordings have brief interruptions where he changed discs. By the early 1940s, Vienna State Opera performances were often recorded on magnetic tape for delayed broadcast. May occasionally recorded these broadcasts "off the air" with his primitive equipment, filling in sections he had missed during the live performances.

The original discs suffer from a variety of technical problems, including excessive surface noise, distortion, and a frequency range barely better than a telephone. Many of these recordings contain no musical information above 5kHz. Quite often, the cutting stylus had not pre-heated sufficiently when the recording began. This produces a high-pitched squeal when the discs are played back. In his notes on the technical problems, restoration engineer Christian Zimmerli states that on many of the recordings, only about 20% of the information in the grooves is music - the rest is extraneous noise. Koch includes a demonstration of the restoration process on the sampler CD. The last track is an unrestored playback of the *Lohengrin* scene with Margarete Klose and Maria Müller. The high pitched squeal makes it nearly unlistenable. In the restored version, also included, the noise is all but eliminated. Even with Zimmerli's restoration work, the sound on these recordings is extremely crude by the standards of this period, but it is serviceable enough to allow appreciation and enjoyment of the performances.

Koch plans to issue a total of twenty-four volumes, each containing two CDs. By the time this review appears in print, the first eight volumes should be available. These recordings command a premium price - between \$30.00 and \$34.00 per two-CD set in the New York City stores. The sampler disc reviewed here is specially priced - between \$8.00 and \$10.00 depending on the dealer. The sampler comes with a lengthy booklet outlining the complete contents of each of the twenty-four projected volumes. The contents are tantalizing, to say the very least. Excerpts from Richard Strauss' operas are conducted by two of the century's preeminent exponents of his music, Clemens Krauss and Karl Böhm. Strauss appears as conductor in excerpts from *Salome* and Mozart's *Idomeneo*. Excerpts from Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* are led by Hans Knappertsbusch, and the casts include Set Svanholm, Ludwig Hoffmann, Alexander Kipnis and Hans Hotter. Another volume of *Ring* excerpts features performances by Robert Heger and Josef Krips. Perhaps the most intriguing of all the Wagner performances is a complete third act of *Tristan und Isolde* from 1941 conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler. In a press release, Koch listed Arturo Toscanini among the conductors featured in this series, but his name does not appear anywhere in the listings of contents included with the sampler disc. Among the singers to be included are Jussi Bjöerling, Beniamino Gigli, Erna Berger, Lotte Lehmann, Kirsten Flagstad, Lauritz Melchior and Friederich Schorr, to name just a few.

Unfortunately, the good news must end here. If the sampler CD is any indication, the Koch Vienna State Opera Edition is fraught with pitch problems. So many recordings have been transferred at the wrong playback speed that it appears as though the restoration engineer never opened a score during the preparation. Set Svanholm's "Winterstürme" from *Die Walküre* is nearly one-half step sharp, in B major. Max Lorenz' "Celeste Aida" is also about one-half step sharp, as are the Verdi *Un Ballo* selection with Matthieu Ahlersmayer, the chorus from *Die Meistersinger* conducted by Furtwängler, and the Strauss *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* excerpt with Hilde Konetzni.

Many other selections are around one-quarter step sharp, including the “Non più andrai” from *Le Nozze di Figaro* with Paul Schoeffler, the Ortrud/Elsa scene from *Lohengrin* with Klose and Müller, Hans Hotter’s *Der Fliegende Holländer* excerpt, Maria Reining’s “Ach, ich fühl’s” from *Die Zauberflöte*, as well as the Prelude to Act II of *Die Walküre* conducted by Furtwängler. Siegfried’s Rhine Journey, conducted by Clemens Krauss, is one-quarter step flat. This amounts to eleven out of nineteen selections transferred at the wrong pitch, a dismal track record by any standard. In a project of this importance, it is simply inexcusable.

This writer has also heard portions of Vol. 1, 3-1451-2. In addition to pitch problems, there is at least one misidentification. In the Rhadames/Amneris scene from *Aida*, recorded in October 1933, the singers are identified as Giacomo Lauri-Volpi and Gertrude Rüniger. The tenor, however, is not Lauri-Volpi - it is Aureliano Pertile. This, combined with the callous disregard for playback speeds, does not bode well for the remainder of the project. At the premium prices being asked for these recordings, one has a right to expect scrupulous attention to such details. It is difficult to recommend this series on that basis. Many collectors will purchase these recordings in spite of the problems, since the important performances they will contain are unavailable from any other source. Over the past twenty years, a significant body of collective knowledge has amassed in the field of sound recording restoration, yet there are still engineers who remain insensitive to basic issues. The unfortunate number of reissues with pitch errors may soon make the purchase of a variable-speed Compact Disc player a necessity. For some, the Vienna State Opera Edition may be the deciding factor.²

Reviewed by Gary A. Galo

Endnotes

1. **Bizet:** *Carmen*: Prelude (Bruno Walter, cond., Dec. 27, 1937); **Wagner:** *Die Walküre*: Winterstürme (Set Svanholm, tenor, Hans Knappertsbusch, cond., June 15, 1941); Intro. to Act II (Walter Grossmann, bass-bar., Anny Konetzni, sop., Wilhelm Furtwängler, cond., Feb. 17, 1936); *Die Meistersinger*: Wach auf, es nahet gen den Tag (Vienna State Opera Chorus, Furtwängler, cond., Sept. 5, 1938); *Lohengrin*: Entweihte Götter...Ortrud, wo bist du (Margarete Klose, mezzo-sop., Maria Müller, sop., Heinz Tietjen, cond., June 19, 1938); *Der Fliegende Holländer*: Wirst du des Vaters Wahl nicht schelten (Hans Hotter, bass-bar., Helena Braun, sop., Rudolf Moralt, cond., Oct. 17, 1940); *Götterdämmerung*: Siegfried’s Rhine Journey (Clemens Krauss, cond., March 7, 1933); *Rienzi*: Ha! Rienzi hoch!...Erstehe, hohe Roma, neu (Franz Völker, tenor, Josef Krips, cond., May 15, 1933); **R. Strauss:** *Der Rosenkavalier*: Kann mich auch an ein Mädél erinnern (Viorica Ursuleac, sop.,

Krauss, cond., Jan. 22, 1933); Is ein Traum, kann nicht wirklich sein (Eva Hadrabova, mezzo-sop., Maria Gerhard, sop., Krauss, cond., Jan. 22, 1933); *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*: Vater, bist du’s (Hilde Konetzni, sop., Karl Böhm, cond., Nov. 24, 1943); **Verdi:** *Don Carlo*: Dio, che nell’alma infondere amor (Todor Mazaroff, tenor, Piero Pierotic, bar., Walter, cond., Nov. 7, 1937); *Aida*: Celesta Aida (Max Lorenz, tenor, Leopold Ludwig, cond., Sept. 22, 1942); *Un Ballo in Maschera*: Alla vita che t’arride (Matthieu Ahlersmeyer, bar., Böhm, cond., Nov. 27, 1942); **Mozart:** *Le Nozze di Figaro*: Non più andrai (Paul Schöffler, bar., Wilhelm Loibner, cond., May 24, 1938); *Die Zauberflöte*: Ach, ich fühls (Maria Reining, sop., Knappertsbusch, cond., Dec. 4, 1941); **Borodin:** *Prince Igor*: Wenn an Igor’s Stell’ ich wär (Alfred Jerger, bar., Ludwig, cond., Feb. 7, 1941); **Schmidt:** *Notre Dame*: Zwischenspiel (Loibner, cond., Dec. 14, 1938); **Mascagni:** *Cavalleria Rusticana*: Ah! Lo vedo, che hai tu detto?...No, no, Turiddu (Helge

Rosvaenge, tenor, Maria Jeritza, sop., Hugo Reichenberger, cond., Sept. 26, 1933)

2. A few manufacturers, notably Denon and

Sony, now offer CD players with pitch controls. Most of them have a range of $\pm 12\%$, which should be more than sufficient.

Reverend Gary Davis/From Blues to Gospel Talk on the Corner; Sally, Where'd You Get Your Whiskey From ?; Crow Jane; Eagle Rocking Blues; Cocaine Blues; Lost John; Samson and Delilah; I Heard the Angels Singing; Children of Zion; Lord I Wish I Could See; Down By the River; You Better Get Right; I'll Do My Last Singing. Reverend Gary Davis, vocal and 12-string Bozo guitar. Recorded 1971. Biograph BCD-123. 50'32".

Skip James/Greatest of the Delta Blues Singers Hardtimes Killing Floor Blues; Sick Bed Blues; Washington D.C. Hospital Center Blues; Devil Got My Woman; Illinois Blues; I Don't Want A Woman to Stay Up All Night Long; Cherry Ball Blues; Skip's Worried Blues; Cypress Grove Blues; Motherless & Fatherless; All Night Long. Skip James, vocal and acoustic guitar. Recorded 1964 (reissues). Biograph BCD-122. 51'19".

Memphis Minnie/Early Rhythm and Blues 1949 from the Rare Regal Sessions (sampler) *Down Home Girl; Night Watchman Blues (two versions); Why Did I Make You Cry; Kid Man Blues; all by Memphis Minnie, vocal and guitar, Sunnyland Slim, piano, bass and drums, unk; *Ludella; by Jimmy Rogers, vocal and guitar, Little Walter, harmonica, Muddy Waters (?), guitar, Big Crawford, bass, Johnny Jones (?) drums; *Hard Work Boogie; Your Evil Ways; I Sit Up All Night; State Street Blues; all by St. Louis Jimmy (Oden), vocal; Roosevelt Sykes, piano, Jimmy Rogers (?) guitar, bass and drums, unk; *When I Was Young; by Sunnyland Slim, vocal, piano; tenor sax, guitar, bass and drums, unk; *Vicksburg Blues; A & B Blues; After Hour Blues; by Little Brother Montgomery, piano; *Sugar Mama Blues; Shreveport Blues; by Pee Wee Hughes, vocal, guitar; harmonica, drums, unk. Recorded 1949; reissued from Regal Records. Biograph BCD-124. 44'12".

Johnny Shines/Mr. Cover Shaker The Devil's Daughter; Look Behind the Door; Two Steps to Hell; The Face in the Courthouse: Blood Ran Like Wine; May I Apologize; by Johnny Shines, vocal and National Steel Guitar. Recorded 1972, previously unissued. Blood Ran Like Wine; I'm Getting Old; Mother's Place; Mr. Cover Shaker; Shotgun Wupin'; Lost Love Letter Blues; Stand By Me; by Johnny Shines, vocal and electric and acoustic guitar, Dave Bromberg, acoustic and electric guitar, madolin, Mark Bell drums, Peter Eckland, trumpet, cornet, Tony Markellis, electric bass, John Payne, reeds, Lou Terriciano, piano, Richard Tiven, vln, Jay Unger, fiddle, Jean Lieberman, Beverly Rohlehr, Jane Simms, choir. Recorded 1974. Biograph BCD-125. 43'23".

These four 1992 Biograph CD releases are a fine addition to that label's already substantial catalog of early jazz, ragtime and blues recordings. Taken together, these four CDs cover styles ranging from country blues, blues and gospel songs, to that Mississippi Delta-to-Chicago continuum which here includes early rhythm and blues as well as the mid-1970s pairing of Johnny Shines with the Dave Bromberg Band. Although not intended to be a set (as with many recent reissue packages), these four discs complement one another nicely and provide the listener an interesting overview of some work by key figures in blues history.