

Verdi: *Requiem*. Maria Caniglia (soprano), Ebe Stignani (mezzo-soprano), Beniamino Gigli (tenor), Ezio Pinza (bass); Chorus and Orchestra of the Rome Opera conducted by Tullio Serafin (Rec. August 1939). Dutton Laboratories CDXL 7101 (1 CD).

Verdi: *Requiem*. (Same as above). Pearl CD 9162 (1 CD).

In the Spring 1991 issue of the *ARSC Journal* (1991;22[1]:113-114) this writer reviewed the Angel/EMI CD reissue of this classic recording.¹ Since the considerable virtues of the performance were discussed at that time, they will not be repeated here. EMI's transfer was plagued with technical problems, including poor tape editing and artificial reverberation in parts of the recording. Fortunately, the EMI CD is now out of print. Those who have awaited an acceptable transfer of these twenty 78 rpm sides will be delighted that two respected labels specializing in historical recordings have elected to reissue the 1939 Verdi *Requiem*. Mark Obert-Thorn is the transfer engineer and producer of the Pearl CD, and his work reflects a philosophy radically different from that of Michael J. Dutton on the Dutton Laboratories disc.

Dutton's transfer is indicative of his activist approach to 78 rpm restoration. On first hearing, one is struck by the near-absence of surface noise. This has not been accomplished without a price, however. Dutton's transfer is rather dull and muffled in the treble region when compared to this writer's post-war Victor 78 rpm pressings. Dutton uses both the de-clicking and de-hissing modules of the Cedar Production System (de-clicking removes random clicks and pops; de-hissing removes steady-state surface noise). He appears to have carried the de-hissing to excess. Any de-hissing system, whether digital or analog, can be made to "pump" or "breathe" if the noise reduction is carried to an extreme. This happens occasionally on the Dutton CD, usually when soft, sustained notes are followed by rests. A case in point is the introduction to the "Tuba mirum", beginning with the six trumpets at measure 91, page 33 of the Dover full score.² While the dotted half notes are sustained, one can hear surface noise in the background. However, during the eighth rests that follow, the noise is rapidly attenuated. Although Dutton has refrained from adding artificial stereo processing to this recording (recent Dutton CDs indicate that he has responded to criticism and abandoned this practice), he has added a touch of reverberation. The reverberation is completely unnecessary, since the original recording was very well balanced in this regard. Dutton has also equalized the recording to add warmth to the lower midrange.

Mark Obert-Thorn's transfer is far more "purist" in approach. Although the Pearl CD is noisier than Dutton's, it is also more open in the treble region, and has far more presence and immediacy. Obert-Thorn has also extracted more inner detail from the originals, particularly in the orchestra. He has not attempted to equalize the original recordings beyond selection of the proper bass turnover frequency and judicious high frequency filtering (these records were made without treble preemphasis, making a radical treble rolloff in playback inappropriate). The Cedar de-clicking process was used on this transfer, but no de-hissing was employed. This writer cannot hear any negative side effects from the Cedar processing on the Pearl CD. In general, Obert-Thorn has attempted to extract as much musical information from the original record grooves, without eradicating their basic sonic characteristics. His transfer of the 1939 Verdi *Requiem* is an extremely honest presentation of the original, with sound remarkably similar to what this writer hears on his own 78 rpm copy.

The editing of side breaks has been generally very well done by both Obert-Thorn and Dutton. However, the difficult join between sides 9 and 10 of the original 78 rpm album, which links the "Ingemisco" with "Confutatis maledictis", has been more skillfully accomplished in Obert-Thorn's hands (Dover, p. 77, measure 501). Neither transfer achieves perfect timing through the edit, but the gap on the Dutton CD is too long to be considered acceptable. The very slight hesitation on Obert-Thorn's transfer will probably pass unnoticed unless the listener is extremely attentive.

Collectors should be reminded that the original 78s are missing eleven measures. In "Lux æterna", Side 16, the entire a cappella trio from measures 84 to 93 is cut (Dover, p. 156). The run-out area on this side is less than 3/8 of an inch. At Serafin's tempo (or anyone else's, for that matter) the missing music would have required approximately twenty-five additional seconds. It was obviously impossible to fit the entire movement on a single side.

The other incision is more difficult to understand. The first measure of the orchestral introduction to "Lacrymosa dies illa", marked *Largo* in the score, is missing (Dover, p. 92, measure 624). Side 11 begins on the second measure of the *Largo*. Here, the missing measure would have required only four to five additional seconds, and would have fit comfortably on this side. One might conclude that the original producer made an error in planning the side breaks. Both CDs contain the performance complete as originally recorded. For the reasons cited above, only listeners completely intolerant of 78 rpm surface noise should consider the Dutton CD. In this reviewer's opinion, there is no contest - the Pearl/Obert-Thorn CD is the transfer of choice.
Reviewed by Gary A. Galo.

Endnotes

1. Galo, Gary A. "Verdi: *Requiem*" in *ARSC Journal*, 1991;22(1):113-114.
2. Verdi: *Requiem* - In Full Score. (New York: Dover Publications, 1978).

Elisabeth Rethberg - The Complete Brunswick Recordings, 1924-1929. Romophone 81012 (2 CDs).

To acquire the services of an artist of Elisabeth Rethberg's caliber would make any opera house proud and happy. That good fortune befell the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City on November 22, 1922. The opera was *Aida* and Sigrid Onegin, also making her Met debut, sang Amneris. For the next twenty years Rethberg performed leading roles for spinto soprano in the German, Italian and Mozartian repertoire. The soprano was born Elisabeth Sättler on September 22, 1894, at Schwarzenberg in Saxony. She died in New York in 1976. After her retirement from the Met, Rethberg never again sang in public. Her recordings, however, have continued to keep her memory alive among opera lovers all over the world. Hence, this edition of her first recordings for the Brunswick label is a welcome addition to the CD catalog. After her debut in Dresden in 1915, where she sang for the next seven seasons, Rethberg appeared also in Berlin, Leipzig and Scandinavia. In 1922 she came to the Met, where she remained for the rest of her career.

The Brunswick recordings were made during those first years, from 1924 to 1929, and capture the soprano in her absolute vocal prime. The first nineteen excerpts are acoustical and the following twenty-seven were recorded during the dawn of the elec-