

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-

trical process. Both recording processes give a good account of the color, size and dynamic range of this splendid vocal instrument.

The overall sound of the transfers on this set of two CDs is excellent. There is some scratchiness in some takes, especially in Flies' "Wiegenlied", but the engineer chose, with good sense, not to sacrifice brilliance for the sake of deleting surface noise. Listening to these recordings, Rethberg's most obvious strengths lie in her peerless vocal technique and seamless vocal line. The lower middle register has a dark hue and is both articulate and expressive. The middle register (roughly from B-flat to F) is where we find the soprano at her best. It is one of the most beautiful sounds in the recorded history of the soprano voice, a sound to rival that of Muzio and Ponselle (her first competitors at the Met), and Renata Tebaldi in more recent years. Her high register is pure and shimmering with a faster vibrato than the rest of the voice, which gives an impression of urgency, very important in singing lirico-spinto and dramatic roles. She seldom uses chest voice, although in "Deh vieni, non tardar" from *Le Nozze di Figaro*, where she has no other alternative than to use chest voice to sing the low "A", one is surprised to hear the beauty of these tones and the reticence, on Rethberg's part, to sing more often in this register. Did she adhere to the theory that chest tones are harmful to soprano voices? This might explain why, for example, Rethberg sings the last phrase of "La Mamma Morta" from *Andrea Chenier* up an octave. Her use of pianissimi and head tones in the middle and high registers is masterful, as heard on the high "C" in the 1924 acoustical "O Patria Mia". Rethberg's musicality is flawless, her phrasing first rate, and her sense of musical timing enviable. Her diction, in Italian, progressed from mediocre in the acoustical recordings to passable in the last electrics. I must add that her diction continued to improve in later recordings, serving as evidence of her hard work and aim for excellence.

Now and then an artist, while giving a beautiful reading of an aria, turns a phrase and makes it an outstanding experience. One such example is found in "Mi chiamano Mimi". On the words "così gentil" Rethberg finds the exact color and expression to describe the words "so gentle". Also, her use of "appoggiature" in "De vieni, non tardare" is a thing of real beauty. No artist is perfect and, alas, Rethberg is no exception. In her luscious voice and brilliant musical execution there is something missing – Fire! The dramatic temperament so evident in the singing of Ponselle and Muzio, is absent in Rethberg. Without using the word "cold" I would call her renditions of these arias and songs perfunctory. Every comma, every rest, each dynamic marking is observed, but there is a certain detachment, as if the singer is narrating in the third person, as an observer, rather than as one feeling the action. Many artists have been branded as cold singers when judged solely on their recordings. The microphone can be an inhibiting monster, especially with artists who strive for musical perfection. I did not have the privilege of hearing Rethberg in the theater. Some of my older friends, however, often remark upon her expressiveness and adequate, if not exceptional, acting. These last observations, however, do not erase the commitment of the artist on these records; altogether, the greatness of this soprano and her multiple talents heavily outnumber the few objections of this reviewer. Long may Elisabeth Rethberg live on these remakes of the Brunswick recordings for Romophone! My congratulations to Executive Producer Virginia Barder and Ward Marston, producer and audio restorer. Thanks, also, for the informative booklet by John Steane. *Reviewed by Gustavo Halley.*