

CARUSO—A Legendary Performer. RCA CRM1-1749 (mono). Leoncavallo: Pagliacci—Vesti la giubba (C-4317-1, 3/17/07); Puccini: Tosca—E lucevan le stelle (B-8346-1, 11/6/09); Verdi: Rigoletto—Questa o quella (B-6035-1, 3/16/08); La donna e mobile (B-6033-1, 3/16/08); Meyerbeer: L'Africana—O paradiso (C-4160-2, 2/20/07); Halévy: La Juive—Rachel, quand du Seigneur (C-24461-2, 9/14/20); Puccini: La Bohème—Che gelida manina (C-3101-1, 2/11/06); Verdi: Aida—Celeste Aida (C-11423-1, 12/27/11); Ponchielli: La Gioconda—Cielo e mar (C-8718-1, 3/14/10); Bizet: Carmen—La fleur que tu m'avais jetée (C-8350-1, 11/7/09); Puccini: Tosca—Recondita armonia (B-8347-1, 11/6/09); Gounod: Faust—Salut, demeure chaste et pure (C-3102-1, 11/11/06); Donizetti: L'Elisir d'Amore—Una furtiva lagrima (C-996-2, 11/26/11); Flotow: Martha—M'appari (C-3100-1, 2/11/06); Handel: Xerses—Ombra mai fu (C-23714-5, 1/29/20); Verdi: Il Trovatore—Di quella pira (B-3103-1, 2/11/06).

CARUSO—Legendary Performer

After many previous attempts, on countless 78's, 45's, and LP's, issued in the US and elsewhere, done with overdubbed orchestras, on special plastic, with and without filters, right playing speed, wrong playing speed, RCA has finally done it. We now have a good, clear, background-quiet, full-voiced Enrico Caruso on LP. The record, which succeeds where all before have failed, uses computer technology to achieve its surprising results.

When I first heard of this project a few years ago, I was more than slightly skeptical—not that I didn't think the computer could do it. I just thought proper application of basic electronic rerecording technique could give fine results, and the continual stream of failure to achieve full-fidelity transfers of acoustic records was due to the opposing pressures of getting good sound and eliminating scratch, and A&R versus Sales. At the time I was deeply involved in engineering a number of discs from early 78's and knew much more could be achieved than we were getting.

The computer adds a couple of features, the most important (given the proper program) being the ability to discriminate between the desired signal and the unwanted background noise mixed in the same narrow frequency band, which after processing, leaves the former in the clear and sharply reduces the second. It also removes the random distortion caused by the casual variations in old acoustic recording equipment.

The records sound somewhat like early electrics—not new tapes—but more enjoyable than any other LP issues of them (or the 78's, for that matter.) The false duskiness of the mid-range on the originals is gone, like excising a sympathetically vibrating shadow.

This may not be the sound you associate with the Caruso name, especially if you subscribe to playing acoustic records with steel needles on old horn-type players, as one cult does, but to them electrical technology is blasphemy. Most will find this more than an experimental curiosity. All other methods are stop-gap.

Not that the Soundstream Company's method is perfect. More time might have been spent in analyzing the uppermost components of Caruso's voice. By forcing the top end with an equalizer, and listening through the heavy scratch, I still hear a bit more than this method can now, apparently, safely venture to program out. It's a major breakthrough, nonetheless, and particularly repays concentrated listening by those interested in voice culture. No ensembles or piano-accompanied items are included, possibly because of the relatively early stage we are at in this developing programming technique.

A complaint or two (what review would be complete without them). Certainly enough good copies of all the records here recorded were available so clickless and thumpless tape copies could have been edited together before shooting them through the computer.

The selections are the famous takes of the famous records-- nothing unpublished or rare. Trill notwithstanding, I could have done without the dull Xerxes excerpt.

The booklet supplied has a more detailed explanation of the techniques employed, photos, and notes by Francis Robinson which are more informative and less gushy than usual.

I'd like to offer a suggestion for a future project. RCA has never done an LP by my own favorite tenor, the great lyric Edmund Clement. I'm sure each reader has his own ideas. Support the sale of this record, and maybe RCA will be encouraged enough to keep the computer plugged in.

Steven Smolian