



**Nellie
MELBA**

**The Complete American
Recordings, Vol. 2**

MOZART

PUCCINI

DONIZETTI

DEBUSSY

HAHN

New restorations by Ward Marston

Nellie Melba (1861-1931)

The Complete Victor Recordings, Vol. 2

By 1904 Melba was at the zenith of her career; a latter-day Jenny Lind she had long been an international synonym for bel canto when the 'test' recordings she made in her London apartment in March for the Gramophone and Typewriter Company were put on general release. Whereas these represented yet another commercial coup for the Company, to place with Caruso and others, to the diva herself they became functional adjuncts to her already household name: not merely calling-cards for the benefit of royalty, journalists and the like, but testaments to singing teachers around the world of her hallowed García-Marchesi method to be aired to students. Few of the first published matrices were without technical flaws, however, and during the years that followed, with improving technology, many of the London selections were re-recorded, and with the New York sessions (from 1907 onwards), further opportunities were afforded, theoretically, at least, both for improvement on what had so far been achieved, and also to reflect recent additions to Melba's repertoire (see Producer's Note, Melba American Recordings Vol.1, Naxos 8.110334).

Nellie Melba was born Helen Porter Mitchell in Richmond, near Melbourne, on 19th May, 1861, the eldest child of immigrant David Mitchell, a self-employed builder and amateur bass singer who had come from Scotland during the 1851 gold rush. Her mother encouraged her to study piano, organ and singing and during her teens, at Melbourne Presbyterian Ladies' College, Nellie received her first serious vocal training from Ellen Christian, an English-born contralto and former pupil of the baritone and preceptor Manuel García Jr., the inventor of the laryngoscope. After leaving college in 1880, she continued her studies in Melbourne with Pietro Cecchi, an Italian tenor from California who had toured Australia in Lyster's company.

In 1882 she married Charles Armstrong, a sugar-plantation owner from Brisbane. Although she bore him a son, the marriage was not a happy one and she soon decided to pursue her career instead, first as a pianist at society functions then as a soprano. Continuing her training with Cecchi, in Australia she earned rave notices and in 1886, on her father's appointment as commissioner to the Indian and Colonial Exhibition in London, she resolved to try her luck in Europe and went with him. In London, at that time a major cultural centre, she made little initial impact but in Paris she had the good fortune to meet the catalyst to her future success in Mathilde Marchesi (1821-1913), herself a noted ex-contralto pupil of the younger García and a celebrated teacher, from whose Parisian studio had emerged a long line of sopranos schooled in the 'Marchesi Method'. Under Marchesi's guidance Melba made a successful début, as Gilda in *Rigoletto*, at the Brussels Monnaie, in October 1887.

Melba's high-profile début at Covent Garden, as Lucia, in May 1888, in a house newly refurbished for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee season, while not artistically so unqualified a triumph, brought her both royal patronage and an entrée to high society through a patroness of the arts, Lady De Grey. From 1889 onwards Covent Garden would remain the focal point of her career and ever afterwards Melba regarded it as her artistic home, appearing in almost every annual international season until 1914, and after the first World War more intermittently until her retirement in 1926. The other prestigious débuts of her operatic phase included the Paris Opéra in 1889, La Scala, Milan, in 1892 and the Metropolitan, New York, in 1893. Additionally, she was a regular attraction at Monte Carlo and a firm favourite at major opera centres in Italy, Russia, Scandinavia and Austria.

Melba's 1904 season at the Met was cut short by indisposition (she appeared only once, in *La Bohème*)

and, as Vincent Sheean reminds us (in *The Amazing Oscar Hammerstein*) by January 1907, when she was once again on the New York stage (as Violetta in *La traviata*) with the Met's struggling rival, Oscar Hammerstein's recently-opened Manhattan Opera Company, she was "a dominant figure in opera everywhere, and the curiosity over her return to America was great". As a calculating businesswoman Melba apparently did this neither for money nor kudos (having reached the summit of opera she now knew her parabola was descending) but rather out of admiration for the German-born entrepreneur, that "most American of Americans, and the only man who ever made me change my mind". By this time Melba's fame, Sheean estimated, "transcended opera and even the theater itself, becoming part of the general consciousness".

Two months later Melba made her first Victor recordings and already the selections were beginning to reflect her gradual evolution from uncrowned queen of opera to best-selling concert attraction. Soon concerts and promotion were to be her mainstay and during the remainder of her career she would 'sing to the masses', making several protracted recital tours of Europe, the United States and Australia. Sharing plaudits with violin

virtuoso Kubelik and her long-standing friend, flute obbligatist and manager John Lemmoné, especially after 1912, she made extensive tours of Great Britain, the United States and Canada. In common with McCormack and other major concert attractions she embraced popular taste without condescension.

Melba's 1909-1910 American sessions offer, in the midst of other operatic items, some creditable repeats of the *Lucia* and *Hamlet* Mad Scenes (most recently attempted at the Camden sessions of 1907), *Se saran rose* (her 1888-vintage 'Melba Waltz') and samples of her newly-assumed role of Desdemona. The bias, however, has shifted markedly towards art song, some of it interestingly self-accompanied, including historically compelling (if slightly less-than-idiomatic) renderings of Debussy's *En sourdine* and Reynaldo Hahn's *D'une prison* and three songs by her erstwhile accompanist and arranger Landon Ronald (1873-1938): *O Lovely Night* and originally unpublished versions of *Down In The Forest* and *White Sea Mist* (this last first attempted at the July 1907 session, with the composer at the piano).

Peter Dempsey

Ward Marston

In 1997 Ward Marston was nominated for the Best Historical Album Grammy Award for his production work on BMG's Fritz Kreisler collection. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, Marston's name is 'synonymous with tender loving care to collectors of historical CDs'. Opera News calls his work 'revelatory', and *Fanfare* deems him 'miraculous'. In 1996 Ward Marston received the Gramophone award for Historical Vocal Recording of the Year, honouring his production and engineering work on Romophone's complete recordings of Lucrezia Bori. He also served as re-recording engineer for the Franklin Mint's Arturo Toscanini issue and BMG's Sergey Rachmaninov recordings, both winners of the Best Historical Album Grammy.

Born blind in 1952, Ward Marston has amassed tens of thousands of opera classical records over the past four decades. Following a stint in radio while a student at Williams College, he became well-known as a reissue producer in 1979, when he restored the earliest known stereo recording made by the Bell Telephone Laboratories in 1932.

In the past, Ward Marston has produced records for a number of major and specialist record companies. Now he is bringing his distinctive sonic vision to bear on works released on the Naxos Historical label. Ultimately his goal is to make the music he remasters sound as natural as possible and true to life by 'lifting the voices' off his old 78 rpm recordings. His aim is to promote the importance of preserving old recordings and make available the works of great musicians who need to be heard.

The Naxos historical label aims to make available the greatest recordings in the history of recorded music, in the best and truest sound that contemporary technology can provide. To achieve this aim, Naxos has engaged a number of respected restorers who have the dedication, skill and experience to produce restorations that have set new standards in the field of historical recordings.

- DEBUSSY:**
1 *En sourdine* 3:08
 1st January 1909
 C 6697-1 (IRCC 35; unpublished on Victor)
- RONALD:**
2 *Down in the Forest* 2:51
 1st January 1909
 C 6698-1 (IRCC 52; unpublished on Victor)
- RONALD:**
3 *White Sea Mist* 2:16
 1st January 1909
 C 6699-2 (IRCC 52; unpublished on Victor)
- HAHN:**
4 *D'une prison* 2:43
 1st January 1909
 C 6700-1 (Victor 88151)
- MOORE:**
5 *Believe Me, If All Those Endearing Young Charms* 2:39
 1st January 1909
 C 6701 -I (Victor 88156)
- VERDI: Otello:**
6 *Piangea cantando nell'erma landa* 4:32
 [Willow Song]
 6th January 1909
 C 6704-1 (Victor 88148)
- VERDI: Otello:**
7 *Ave Maria, piena di grazia* 3:30
 6th January 1909
 C. 6705-1 (Victor 88149)
- PUCCHINI: La Bohème:**
8 *Donde lieta uscì al tuo grido d'amore* 3:16
 6th January 1909;
 C 4341-2 (HMV 053111; unpublished on Victor)
- RONALD:**
9 *O Lovely Night* 4:00
 6th January 1909
 C 6706-1 (Victor 88182)
- MILLER:**
10 *Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon* 2:49
 6th January 1909
 C 6707-1 (Victor 88150)
- PUCCHINI: La Bohème:**
11 *Mi chiamano Mimi* 4:15
 22nd August 1910
 C 4281-4 (Victor 88074)
- PUCCHINI: La Bohème:**
12 *Donde lieta uscì al tuo grido d'amore* 3:23
 23rd August 1910
 C 4341-3 (Victor 88072)
- VERDI: La traviata:**
13 *Ah fors' è lui... Follie, follie!... Sempre libera* 5:02
 23rd August 1910
 C 4339-3 (Victor 88064)
- BISHOP:**
14 *Lo! Here the Gentle Lark* 3:14
 with John Lemmoné, Flute
 23rd August 1910
 C 4350-3 (Victor 88073)
- MOZART: Le nozze di Figaro:**
15 *Voi che sapete* 3:31
 23rd August 1910
 C 4353-2 (Victor 88067)
- ARDITI:**
16 *Se saran rose* 3:05
 23rd August 1910
 C 4356-2 (Victor 88076)

- | | | |
|--|-------------|--|
| <p>GOUNOD: Faust:
 17 <i>Ah! Je ris de me voir si belle</i>
 [Jewel Song]
 24th August 1910
 C 4338-3 (Victor 88066)</p> | <p>3:01</p> | <p>THOMAS: Hamlet
 21 <i>Des larmes de la nuit</i> 4:46
 [Mad Scene]
 with John Lemmoné, Flute
 25th August 1910
 C 937M (Victor 882SI)</p> |
| <p>HANDEL: Il penseroso
 18 <i>Sweet Bird</i>
 with John Lemmoné, Flute
 24th August 1910
 C 4358-2 (Victor 88068)</p> | <p>4:35</p> | <p>Tracks 1-4 with anonymous pianist
 Tracks 5 & 10 with Nellie Melba, piano
 Tracks 6-9 & 11-21 with anonymous orchestra
 conducted by Walter B. Rogers</p> |
| <p>DONIZETTI: Lucia di Lammermoor
 19 <i>Ardon gl'incensi</i>
 [Mad Scene]
 with John Lemmoné, Flute
 24th August 1910
 C 4349-2 (Victor 88071)</p> | <p>4:58</p> | <p>NOTE:
 It is highly unlikely that Melba would have been skilled enough as an accompanist to be able both to sing and play the tricky piano part of <i>Down in the Forest</i> (track 2) or <i>White Sea Mist</i> (track 3), let alone the very difficult <i>En Sourdine</i> (track 1). The Victor label states that <i>D'une prison</i> (track 4) is self-accompanied. Although it is possible, listeners will be able to hear that it is recorded in the same perspective as the previous three selections. In our opinion, <i>Believe Me, If All Those Endearing Young Charms</i> (track 5), <i>Ye Banks and Braes</i> (track 10) and <i>Mattinata</i> (track 20, vol. 1 Naxos 8.110334) are the only selections on Victor in which Melba accompanied herself.</p> |
| <p>MASSENET: Don César de Bazan
 20 <i>À Séville, belles Señoras</i>
 [Sevillana]
 with John Lemmoné, Flute
 24th August 1910
 C 9270-1 (Victor 88252)</p> | <p>2:57</p> | |

Playing
Time
74:33

Nellie Melba

The Complete American Recordings, Vol. 2
1909-10

8.110335

ADD



All rights in this sound recording, artwork, texts and translations reserved. Unauthorised public performance, broadcasting and copying of this compact disc prohibited. © & © 2005 Naxos Rights International Ltd.

- 1 **DEBUSSY:** En sourdine
- 2 **RONALD:** Down in the Forest
- 3 **RONALD:** The White Sea Mist
- 4 **HAHN:** D'une prison
- 5 **MOORE:** Believe Me, If All Those Endearing Young Charms
- 6 **VERDI: Otello:** Piangea cantando nell'erma landa [Willow Song]
- 7 **VERDI: Otello:** Ave Maria, piena di grazia
- 8 **PUCCHINI: La Bohème:** Donde lieta uscì al tuo grido d'amore
- 9 **RONALD:** O Lovely Night
- 10 **MILLER:** Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon
- 11 **PUCCHINI: La Bohème:** Mi chiamano Mimi
- 12 **PUCCHINI: La Bohème:** Donde lieta uscì al tuo grido d'amore
- 13 **VERDI: La traviata:** Ah fors' è lui... Follie, follie!... Sempre libera
- 14 **BISHOP:** Lo! Here the Gentle Lark
- 15 **MOZART: Le nozze di Figaro:** Voi che sapete
- 16 **ARDITI:** Se saran rose
- 17 **GOUNOD: Faust:** Ah! Je ris de me voir si belle [Jewel Song]
- 18 **HANDEL: Il penseroso:** Sweet Bird
- 19 **DONIZETTI: Lucia di Lammermoor:** Ardon gl'incensi [Mad Scene]
- 20 **MASSENET: Don César de Bazan:** A Séville, belles Señoras [Sevillana]
- 21 **THOMAS: Hamlet:** Des larmes de la nuit [Mad Scene]

This volume is the second of a series of three Naxos discs containing all the known recordings Melba made for the Victor Talking Machine in Camden, New Jersey and New York. Although these 1909-1910 sessions offer improved repeats of the *Lucia* and *Hamlet Mad Scenes* (also recorded in 1907, Naxos 8.110334), and examples of her newly-assumed rôle of Desdemona, the bias has shifted markedly towards art song. These include compelling renderings of Debussy's *En sourdine* and Reynaldo Hahn's *D'une prison* and three songs by her accompanist and arranger Landon Ronald (1873-1938), *O Lovely Night* and originally unpublished versions of *Down In The Forest* and *White Sea Mist*.

MADE IN THE EU



Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Ward Marston
Special thanks to Neil Forster, Harry Glaze, Lawrence Holdridge, Peter Lack and Jim Peters · Previously released on Romophone

www.naxos.com

A complete track list can be found in the booklet
Cover image: Nellie Melba as Mimi from *La Bohème*
(The Tully Potter Collection)

