Feodor Chaliapin (1873-1938)  
A Vocal Portrait

The truth and directness of his singing is such that one cannot forget it is singing; singing usually implies some strain or affectation, but Chaliapin's seems the most inevitably natural utterance*.

Richard Capell, 1914

The international career of Feodor Ivanovich Chaliapin began in Milan in March 1901 with performances of Boito's Mefistofele and ended only months before his death in Paris in 1938. During this period he recorded some 130 different titles and this Vocal Portrait includes discs made throughout this career, from several different corners of his repertoire.

Well before that auspicious Italian début, in which Cursu also sang, - a thousand plies that they never recorded together - Chaliapin had achieved considerable success in his Russian homeland, first with appearances at Tiflis Opera in 1893, soon progressing to the Imperial Opera at the Marinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, where he became a friend of the actor Munnnt Dalsky. Under Dalsky's direction, Chaliapin learned much about the mental and psychological preparation needed for opera performance, which he brought to bear on performances throughout his life and which assured him the reputation as the twentieth century's supreme dramatic baritone. From St Petersburg, Chaliapin moved in 1896 to Moscow and in 1899 joined the Bolshoy Opera, which he remained with until the outbreak of the First World War. By that time he had already sung at the Metropolitan Opera in New York (1907-8), with Dyagilev's company in Paris (from 1908), and with the same ensemble at London's Drury Lane Theatre in 1913-14. Chaliapin returned to the Metropolitan for the remainder of the war, but finally left Russia in 1921, never to return. He was already widely known for his portrayals of Boris and Varlaam in Boris Godunov, Mihail Akhmatov (both Boito's and Gounod's) Don Quichotte in Offenbach's opera, which he created in Monte Carlo in 1916, and Igor, Galitzky and Khan Konchak in Borodin's Prince Igor. Of these roles Chaliapin was the greatest interpreter of his day. His impersonations of Don Basilio in Il barbiere di Siviglia, Leporello in Don Giovanni, and King Philip in Don Carlelo (his preferred role) were so identified, if less ideal than his other assumptions. To them all he brought an individual approach and a high physical stage presence that dominated every performance.

In the world of song, again principally Russian, Chaliapin was also an eager interpreter, though as the accompanist Gerald Moore recalled in his Memoirs of an Accompanist - 'Am I too Loud!'

...in the light of my experience now, I say that Chaliapin was not a first-class Lieder singer...The most discriminating devotee of Schubert or Schumann would be swept, temporarily at least, off his feet, against his better judgement, by the man's historic mastery and the power of his personal magnetism...It was all a question of mood - not the mood of the music but of the singer and whether he considered himself in good voice or not...Yet there is no doubt in my mind that I was playing for a great singer, who could lift the audience out of their seats and thrill them as few before or since have been able to thrill. Certainly I have never been associated with a more exciting artist.*

Moore might have continued by adding that the performance here of Brahms' Sapphische Ode (in Russian, it must be one of the most gravely beautiful ever recorded).

The excitement generated by Chaliapin resulted largely from his superb vocal technique. The voice was even throughout its range, allowing him to tackle selected baritone arias as well as his customary bass ones; it was sharply focused, free of vibrato and could be fined down to the merest thread of sound when the music (or, rather, Chaliapin's understanding of the music) demanded it. That the voice changed little during Chaliapin's life is amply demonstrated by the present recordings, which cover a 35 year period.

The earliest disc here, Karganov's Elegy, was one of a group of recordings that Chaliapin made at the Hotel Continental in Moscow. In 1902 the great impresario of the gramophone world Fred Gaisberg took Chaliapin under his wing (the image of anyone taking Chaliapin under their wing is bizarre, but both men valued their friendship) and was subsequently responsible for many of Chaliapin's finest recordings. In those early days, Chaliapin's recording sessions took place primarily in Moscow, St Petersburg and the Latvian capital, Riga.

In 1908, during Chaliapin's first season with Dyagilev in Paris, he recorded several items from his repertoire. The Lakané aria (again, in Russian) illustrates how well the acoustic recording system suited his voice, achieving far more realistic results than many higher-voiced singers. Chaliapin made further records in Paris during the electric era, including the scenes from Faust in 1930, he was not now a visitor to the city but a resident, from where he set out on many overseas tours during the last fifteen years of his life.

Oroveso's aria from Norma was one of a number of sides made during the singer's only Italian recording session, held in Milan in April 1912. Its conductor, Carlo Sabajano, was responsible for literally hundreds of superb operatic discs made for HMV well into the age of electrical recording.

Chaliapin's American recordings were made during his return seasons to the Met. The previously unpublished take of the second part of King Philip's great aria from Don Carlos was recorded just ten days before his first New York performance of the rôle, in the company of Ponselle and Martellini.

While singing at Drury Lane for the first time under Joseph Beecham's management in 1913, Chaliapin undertook the first of his many recording sessions in London. Chaliapovsky's The Nightingale was one of eight published sides from the session held in the primitive studio of the City Road. When new recording premises were built in Hayes, alongside the Gramophone Company's factory to the west of the capital, Chaliapin was invited to open them and it was there that he made many of his best acoustic records after the First World War. Later sessions were held in the much-lamented Queen's Hall, London's principal concert venue of the time, in Kingsway Hall, now a hotel, (CD 2 track 8) and, most famously, at Covent Garden in 1926 and 1928; these discs reveal Chaliapin in his most theatrically magnificent. At different times he made several recordings from extracts of Mefistofele, his Son lo spirito marked by a demonic whistle, a terrifying interpretation. The live Boris Godunov excerpts are Chaliapin's greatest material. He had learned the parts, perfectly, possessing them and judging him fairly from this vivid portrayal, despite the variety of language used (Chaliapin sang Russian, the rest of the cast Italian) and the hazards encountered when recording during an actual performance. Chaliapin's two final records were made during a tour to Japan in 1936 and he returned to his musical roots for an eloquent farewell. Both songs are included here, The Song of the Flea and The Song of the Volga Boatmen. These look back to the singer's Russian origins and include a commemoration of the mighty river which flows through Kazan, the city of Chaliapin's birth just 63 years earlier.

Paul Campion

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4
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Chaliapin’s two final records were made during a tour to Japan in 1936 and he returned to his musical roots for an eloquent farewell. Both songs are included here, The Song of the Flea and The Song of the Vologda. These look back to the singer’s Russian origins and include a commemoration of the mighty river which flows through Kazan, the city of Chaliapin’s birth just 63 years earlier.

Paul Campion

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1
Feodor Chaliapin (1873-1938)
A Vocal Portrai: CD 1 - Acoustic Recordings

1. MOZART: Don Giovanni
   Madamina, il calloqio è questo
   rec. 25th September 1921; Mats. Bl3200-3 and 3201-2; Cat. DAA555
   5:34

2. BELLINI: Norma
   Ite sul colle, o Druidi
   rec. Milan, 26th April 1912; Mat. 61-403, Cat. 052353
   4:14

3. DONIZETTI: Lucrèce Borgia
   Vieni, la mia vendetta
   rec. St Petersburg, 26th October 1912; Mat. 2693c; Cat. 052388
   3:44

4. MEYERBEER: Robert le diable
   Le rovivo...Suore che riposate
   rec. St Petersburg, 26th October 1912; Mat. 2692c; Cat. 052387
   4:07

5. VERDI: Ernani
   Che mai veggi'io...Infelice
   rec. St Petersburg, 26th October 1912; Mat. 2694a; Cat. 052389
   4:04

6. VERDI: Don Carlos: Dormirò sol
   rec. Camden, 22nd November 1922; Mat. C26104-4; (unpublished take)
   4:16

7. PUCCINI: La bohème: Vecchia zimarra
   rec. Camden, 3rd January 1924; Mat. B29247-2; Cat. AGS11
   3:00

8. DELIBES: Lakmé
   Lakmé, ton doux regard
   rec. Paris, June 1908; Mat. 6184; Cat. 022112
   3:30

9. RUBINSTEIN: The Demon
   Do not weep, child
   rec. St Petersburg, 15th October 1911; Mat. 2495c; Cat. 022225
   3:01

10. RUBINSTEIN: The Demon
    On the ocean of the air
    with Maria Kovalenko, soprano;
    rec. St Petersburg, 12th November 1911; Mat. 2583; Cat. 022262
    4:13

11. BORODIN: Prince Igor
    Have you enjoyed yourself, Prince...
    I can't conceal (Gallitzky's song)
    rec. St Petersburg, 15th October 1911; Mat. 2494; Cat. 022224
    4:03

12. BORODIN: Prince Igor
    Are you well, Prince?
    (Khan Khokhlach's aria)
    rec. Hayes, 14th July 1924; Mat. Cc4883-4; Cat. DB799
    4:40

13. BORODIN: Prince Igor
    Neither sleep nor rest (Igor's aria)
    rec. Hayes, 8th October 1924; Mat. Cc5195; Cat. DB799
    4:29

14. MUSSORGSKY: The Song of the Flea
    rec. Bamburgh, October 1907; Mat. 290m; Cat. 022096
    3:21

15. KORGANOV: Elegy
    rec. Moscow, January 1902; Mat. 574x; Cat. 22822
    2:12

16. TCHAIKOVSKY: The Nightingale
    rec. London, 5th July 1913; Mat. Y16741; Cat. 4-22583
    3:43

17. RACHMANINOV:
    When yesterday we met, Op. 26, No. 13
    rec. St Petersburg, 25th January 1914; Mat. 5303ae (unpublished)
    2:55

18. GLAZUNOV:
    Chanson Bacheque, Op. 27, No. 1
    rec. St Petersburg, 26th October 1912; Mat. 2695c; Cat. 032260
    3:45

19. BRAHMS: Sopphische Ode, Op. 94, No. 4
    rec. St Petersburg, 25th January 1914; Mat. 5303ae; Cat. 4-2269
    3:12

20. GRIEG: Abschied, Op. 4, No. 3
    rec. St Petersburg, 4th April 1914; Mat. 5934ae (unpublished)
    1:34

21. GRIEG: Stambursgrim, Op. 25, No. 3
    rec. St Petersburg, 4th April 1914; Mat. 5934ae (unpublished)
    1:42

22. TRAD.: Mischchen (folk-song)
    rec. St Petersburg, 30th September 1911; Mat. 2454 1/2c; Cat. 022213
    3:49

All tracks recorded for the Gramophone Company except tracks 6 & 7 recorded for Victor.
Feodor Chaliapin (1873-1938)
A Vocal Portrait: CD 1 - Acoustic Recordings

1. MOZART: Don Giovanni
   Madama, il catalogo è questo
   rec. 25th September 1921; Mts. Br32000-3
   and 3201-2; Cat. DA555
   5:34

2. BELLINI: Norma: Ite sul colle, o Druidi
   rec. Milan, 26th April 1912; Mat. 61-44
   Cat. 052353
   4:14

3. DONIZETTI: Lucrezia Borgia: Vieni, la mia vendetta
   rec. St. Petersburg, 26th October 1912;
   Mat. 2693c; Cat. 052388
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4. MEYERBEER: Robert le diable: Le rovino...Suore che riposate
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   4:07

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   rec. St. Petersburg, 26th October 1912;
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   rec. Camden, 22nd November 1922;
   Mat. C26104-6; (unpublished take)
   4:16

7. PUCCINI: La bohème: Vecchia zimarra
   rec. Camden, 3rd January 1924; Mat. B29247-2;
   Cat. AGSA11
   3:00

8. DELIBES: Lakmé:
   Lakmé, ton doux regard
   rec. Paris, June 1908; Mat. 6161; Cat. 022112
   3:30

9. RUBINSTEIN: The Demon:
   Do weep, Child
   rec. St. Petersburg, 15th October 1911;
   Mat. 2495c; Cat. 022225
   3:01

10. RUBINSTEIN: The Demon:
    On the ocean of the air
    with Maria Kovalenko, soprano;
    rec. St. Petersburg, 12th November 1911;
    Mat. 2530c; Cat. 022262
    4:13

11. BORDONI: Prince Igor:
    Have you enjoyed yourself, Prince?...
    I can't conceal (Galitzyx's song)
    rec. St. Petersburg, 15th October 1911;
    Mat. 2494c; Cat. 022224
    4:03

12. BORODIN: Prince Igor:
    Are you well, Prince?
    (Khan Korchak's aria)
    rec. Hayes, 14th July 1924; Mat. Cc4883-4;
    Cat. DB799
    4:40

13. BORODIN: Prince Igor:
    Neither sheep nor rest (Igor's aria)
    rec. Hayes, 8th October 1924; Mat. Cc5195;
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    4:29

14. MUSSORGSKY: The Song of the Flea
    rec. London, 26th October 1907; Mat. 290w;
    Cat. 022096
    2:12

15. KORGANOV: Elegy
    rec. Moscow, January 1920; Mat. 574x;
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    3:43

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    Chanson Bachiou, Op. 27, No. 1
    rec. St. Petersburg, 25th October 1912;
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    2:55

19. BRAHMS: Sapphische Ode, Op. 94, No. 4
    rec. St. Petersburg, 25th January 1914;
    Mat. 5305ae; Cat. 4-22669
    3:12

20. GRIEG: Abschied, Op. 4, No. 3
    rec. St. Petersburg, 4th April 1914;
    Mat. 5933ae (unpublished)
    1:34

    rec. St. Petersburg, 4th April 1914;
    Mat. 5933ae (unpublished)
    1:42

22. TRAD.: Mschenka (folk-song)
    rec. St. Petersburg, 30th September 1911;
    Mat. 2454 1/2c; Cat. 022213
    3:49

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Feodor Chaliapin (1873-1938)
A Vocal Portrait: CD 2 - Electrical Recordings

1. ROSSINI: Il Barbiere di Siviglia:
   La calunnia
   rec. Camden, 18th March 1927;
   Mat. CVE26102-6; Cat. 6783
   4:37

2. BELLINI: La Sonnambula:
   Il muto, il fante...V'arrivo
   rec. Camden, 18th March 1927;
   Mat. CVE27088-5; Cat. 1269
   3:05

3. GOUNOD: Faust:
   Un rat, plus pudron...Le veau d'or
   with Michael Cokeete, baritone
   rec. Paris, 27th February 1930;
   Mat. CF3000-2; Cat. DB1437
   3:32

4. GOUNOD: Faust:
   Vous qui faites l'endormie
   rec. Paris, 27th February 1930;
   Mat. CF3001-3; Cat. DB1437
   3:16

5. BOITO: Mefistofele: Ave Signor!
   rec. Royal Opera House, Covent Garden,
   during the performance of 31st May 1926;
   Mat. CR384; Cat. DB940
   4:02

6. BOITO: Mefistofele: Son lo spiritu
   rec. Royal Opera House, Covent Garden,
   during the performance of 31st May 1926;
   Mat. CR388; Cat. DB942
   3:13

7. MASSENET: Don Quichotte:
   Oh, mon maître...Oui! Je fus le chef
   with Olive Rhine, soprano
   rec. New York, 7th April 1927;
   Mat. CVE38334-1 and CVE38335-1; Cat. 6693
   8:53

8. GLINKA: Ruslan & Ludmila:
   O joy!...the hour of my triumph
   (Faral's rondo)
   rec. London, 8th June 1931;
   Mat. DB582-2; Cat. DB 1530
   3:02

9. RIMSKY-KORSAKOV: Sadko:
   Against the cruel crags
   (Merchant's song)
   rec. London, 20th October 1927;
   Mat. Cc1705-2; Cat. DB1104
   3:37

10. MUSSORGSKY: Boris Godunov:
    In the town of Kazan
    (Varlaam's song)
    rec. Camden, 16th March 1927;
    Mat. CVE26100-4; Cat. 1237
    2:25

11. MUSSORGSKY: Boris Godunov:
    Boris's Farewell and Death Scene
    rec. Royal Opera House, Covent Garden,
    during the performance of 4th July 1928;
    Mats. CR2141-43; Cat. DB1183 and DB3464
    12:09

12. RACHMANNINOFF: Aleko:
    All the gypsy camp is sleeping
    rec. London, 11th November 1929;
    Mat. Cc18156-1; Cat. DB2145
    4:47

13. MUSSORGSKY: Trepak
    from Songs and Dances of Death
    rec. London, 11th November 1929;
    Mat. Cc18157-1; Cat. DB1511
    4:22

14. RUBINSTEIN: Persian Love Song,
    Op. 34, No. 9
    rec. London, 13th May 1931;
    Mat. DB884-3; Cat. DB1525
    4:43

15. TRAD.: Down the Petersky (folk-song)
    rec. London, 13th June 1929;
    Mat. Bb1690-4; Cat. DA1061
    2:02

16. TRAD.: Black Eyes (Gypsy folk-song)
    rec. Paris, 27th September 1927;
    Mat. CTR3080-1; Cat. DB3463
    3:32

17. MUSSORGSKY: The Song of the Flea
    rec. Tokyo, 6th February 1936;
    Mat. 8112-4; Cat. 14901
    3:03

18. TRAD.: Song of the Volga Boatmen
    (folk-song)
    rec. Tokyo, 6th February 1936;
    Mat. 8113-4; Cat. 14901
    3:28

77:50

All tracks recorded for the Gramophone Company except tracks 1, 2, 7, and 10, recorded for American Victor;
Tracks 17 and 18 recorded for Japanese Victor.

Tracks 1, 2, 7 and 10 with orchestra conducted by Rosario Bourdon.
Tracks 3 and 4 with orchestra of the Paris Opera, conducted by Henri Busser.
Tracks 5, 6 and 11 with the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Vincenzo Bellezza.
Track 8 with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Max Steinmann.
Track 9 with orchestra conducted by Albert Coates.
Tracks 12, 13 and 14 with orchestra conducted by Lawrence Collingwood.
Track 15 with balalaika orchestra.
Track 16 with balalaika orchestra conducted by A. A. Scriabin.
Tracks 17 and 18 with piano by George de Godzinsky.

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.
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2. BELLINI: La Sonnambula: Il nullo, il fonte...Vi rassisce
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3. GOUNOD: Faust:
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   rec. Paris, 27th February 1930; Mat. CF3000-2; Cat. DB1437

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   Vous qui faites l'endormie
   rec. Paris, 27th February 1930; Mat. CF3001-3; Cat. DB1437

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   Against the cruel crags
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    Mat. Bb1690-4; Cat. DA1061

16. TRAD.: Black Eyes (Gypsy folk-song)
    rec. Paris, 27th September 1927;
    Mat. CR3080-1; Cat. DB3463

17. MUSSORGSKY: The Song of the Flea
    rec. Tokyo, 6th February 1936;
    Mat. 8112-4; Cat. 14901

18. TRAD.: Song of the Volga Boatmen
    (folk-song)
    rec. Tokyo, 6th February 1936;
    Mat. 8113-4; Cat. 14901

77:50

Tracks recorded for the Gramophone Company except tracks 1, 2, 7, and 10, recorded for American Victor;
Tracks 17 and 18 recorded for Japanese Victor.

Tracks 1, 2, 7 and 10 with orchestra conducted by Rosario Bourdon.
Tracks 3 and 4 with orchestra of the Paris Opera conducted by Henri Busser.
Tracks 5, 6 and 11 with the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Vincenzo Bellezza.
Track 8 with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Max Steinmann.
Track 9 with orchestra conducted by Albert Coates.
Tracks 12, 13 and 14 with orchestra conducted by Lawrence Collingwood.
Track 15 with balalaika orchestra.
Track 16 with balalaika orchestra conducted by A. A. Scriabin.
Tracks 17 and 18 with piano by George de Godzinsky.

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.
FEODOR CHALIAPIN: A Vocal Portrait

CD 1 Acoustic Recordings
1. MOZART: Don Giovanni: Madama, il catalogo è questo
2. BELLINI: Norma: It e sul colpe, o Druidi
3. DONIZETTI: Lucrezia Borgia: Vieni, la mia vendetta
4. MEYERBEER: Roberto il diavolo: Le rovine...Suore che riposate
5. VERDI: Ernani: Che mai veggi'o!...Infelice
6. VERDI: Don Carlos: Dormirò sol
7. PUCCINI: La bohème: Vecchia zimarra
8. DELIBES: Lakmé: Lakmé, ton doux regard
9. RUBINSTEIN: The Demon: Do not weep, child
10. RUBINSTEIN: The Demon: On the ocean of the air
11. BORODIN: Prince Igor: Have you enjoyed yourself, Prince?
12. BORODIN: Prince Igor: Are you well, Prince?
13. BORODIN: Prince Igor: Neither sleep nor rest
14. MUSSORGSKY: The Song of the Flea
15. KORANOV: L'Elégie
16. TCHAIKOVSKY: The Nightingale
17. RACHMANINOV: When yesterday we met
18. GLAZUNOV: Chanson Bachique, Op. 27, No. 1
19. BRAHMS: Sapphische Ode, Op. 94, No. 4
20. GRIEG: Abschied, Op. 4, No. 3
21. GRIEG: Stambogshirn, Op. 25, No. 3
22. TRAD.: Maschenka (folk-song)

CD 2 Electric Recordings
1. ROSSINI: II Barbier di Siviglia: La calunnia
2. BELLINI: La Sonnambula: Il mulino, il fonte...Vi rassuso
3. GOUNOD: Faust: Un rat, plus poltron...Le veau d'or
4. GOUNOD: Faust: Vous qui faites l'endormie
5. BOITO: Mefistofele: Ave Signor!
6. BOITO: Mefistofele: Son lo spirito
7. MASSER: Don Quichotte: Oh, mon maître...Oui! Je fus le chef
8. GLINKA: Ruslan & Ludmila: O joy!...the hour of my triumph
9. RIMSKY-KORSAKOV: Sadko: Against the cruel crags
10. MUSSORGSKY: Boris Godunov: In the town of Kazan
11. MUSSORGSKY: Boris Godunov: Boris's Farewell and Death Scene
12. RACHMANINOV: Aleko: All the gypsy camp is sleeping
13. MUSSORGSKY: Trepak
14. RUBINSTEIN: Persian Love Song
15. TRAD.: Down the Pestersky (folk-song)
16. TRAD.: Black Eyes (Gypsy folk-song)
17. MUSSORGSKY: The Song of the Flea (folk-song)
18. TRAD.: Song of the Volga Boatmen (folk-song)

The legendary Russian bass Feodor Chaliapin was born in 1873 and is widely regarded as the greatest bass singer of his generation. He possessed a magisterial voice of great power and range, and was an unrivalled singing-actor. A major exponent of the Russian repertoire, his operatic portrayals, notably of the title role in Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov, exerted a strong influence upon subsequent generations of singers. This two-disc celebration of the art of Chaliapin covers both his acoustic and later electrical recordings, and includes examples of all the major elements of his extensive repertoire. They include Italian French and Russian, operatic repertoire, Russian songs (Rachmaninoff spoke of Chaliapin's 'limitless and phenomenal talent'), and folksongs, of which the Song of The Volga Boatmen is probably the most popular. Of particular interest in this new issue are the commercial recordings of excerpts from Mefistofele and Boris Godunov, made at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, during performances in 1926 and 1928, when Chaliapin's magnetic stage presence comes across with full force.

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Ward Marston
With thanks to Gregor Benko, J. Richard Harris, Lawrence F. Hodridge and Andrew Karzas

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A complete track list can be found in the booklet
Cover image: Feodor Chaliapin as Don Quichotte 1924
(Private Collection)