



# Great Opera Recordings

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## CHARPENTIER

### Louise

Ninon Vallin

Georges Thill

André Pernet

Aimée Lecouvreur

Christiane Gaudel

Les Choeurs Raugel  
and Orchestra, Paris  
Eugène Bigot

Recorded in 1935

## Great Opera Recordings

Gustave  
**CHARPENTIER**  
(1860-1956)

### Louise

Opera in 4 Acts

Specifically abridged for this recording with the cooperation and consent of the composer

Louise .....	Ninon Vallin
Julien .....	Georges Thill
Le Père .....	André Pernet
La Mère .....	Aimée Lecouvreur
Irma .....	Christiane Gaudel

Les Choeurs Raugel and Orchestra, Paris  
Conducted by Eugène Bigot

Recorded on 16 sides by French Columbia  
28th October - 13th November 1935  
Matrices: CLX 1873/1888  
Catalogue: RFX 47/54

## Act One

- ① Scene I: *O Coeur ami! O Coeur promis* 8:58  
(Louise, Julien)
- ② Scenes II and III:  
*Moi, je vous avais remarqué* 4:03  
(Louise, Julien, La Mère)
- ③ Scene IV: *Bonsoir! La soupe est prête?* 4:37  
(Le Père)

## Act Two

- Tableau 1
- ④ Scenes IV and V: *Elle va paraître, ma joie!* 8:52  
(Marchands et Marchandes Ouvrières, Julien)
- Scene VII: *Laissez-moi, de grâce!*  
(Louise, Julien)
- Tableau 2
- ⑤ Scene I: *L'Atelier* 4:05  
(Les Ouvrières, Irma)
- ⑥ Scene II: *Sérénade: Dans la cité lointaine* 4:20  
(Julien, Choeur des Ouvrières)

## Act Three

- ⑦ Scene 1: *Depuis le jour...* 4:14  
(Louise)
- ⑧ Duo: *Louise est heureuse?* 8:07  
(Louise, Julien, Voix de la Ville)
- ⑨ *Le Couronnement de la Muse* 3:38  
(Cortège et Marche)

## Act Four

- ⑩ *Tu as peut-être eu tort de travailler aujourd'hui* 4:32  
(La Mère, Le Père)
- ⑪ *Louise, Louise, regarde-moi* 4:31  
(Louise, Le Père)
- ⑫ *Tout être a le droit d'être libre* 8:56  
(Louise, Le Père, La Mère)

## Appendix

- ⑬ **JULIEN:** *La voix de la nuit* 5:45  
sung by Maurice Dutreix, tenor  
Rec: 2nd October 1913  
Mats. 2771ah / 2772ah; French HMV 4-32346/7.

Note: this recording is the only example of music from *Julien*, Charpentier's sequel to *Louise*.

## Gustave CHARPENTIER (1860-1956)

### Louise

During the nineteenth century French opera and its subject matter ran the gamut from the stars to the gutter. The excesses of grand opera, with its five acts and interpolated ballet, were mostly concerned with seemingly important events and people. Even the productions of the Opéra-Comique were generally set in some unworldly milieu, but Aubert's and Massenet's settings of *Manon Lescaut* brought in the question of immorality, as did the Italian Verdi's settings of French subjects in *Rigoletto* and *La traviata*. A more demotic and democratic strain in French literature led to operas such as Bizet's *Carmen*, with its leading characters drawn from the common people, and Puccini's *La Bohème*, which dealt with a French novel and concerned itself with struggling artists in Parisian garrets. Other Italian composers such as Mascagni and Leoncavallo (who wrote his own treatment of *La Bohème*, just as Puccini had done one of *Manon Lescaut*) took up this more approachable but also more risqué type of subject. The working-class and bohemian trend in French opera found its most characteristic expression in *Louise*, an opera now remembered for a single aria – indeed, it could be argued that it is known for one exquisite four-note phrase, with which the soprano launches that aria, 'Depuis le jour'. Its composer Gustave Charpentier lived for almost a century, had his one huge success with *Louise* and is now hardly thought of, except when he is confused with his namesake from the time of Louis XIV. The value of the present recording is two-fold: it shows how much enjoyable music there is in *Louise*, apart from 'Depuis le jour', and it preserves near-perfect exemplars of a French style of singing, playing and conducting that is all but vanished today.

Charpentier, who had something of a bohemian reputation himself, deserved his one hit, as he put a great deal of work into it. Humbly born and a late starter in music, he did not reach the Lille Conservatoire until

he was fifteen, and in 1881, when he was already 21, he entered the Paris Conservatoire on a scholarship. For *Louise* he drew on his own experience of living in Montmartre in his student days, which climaxed when he won the Prix de Rome in 1887. It was during his obligatory stay in Rome that he began work on *Louise*, writing the libretto himself although he also had help from friends. He had some success with orchestral works and incorporated an occasional work of 1898, the *Fête du couronnement de la muse*, into Act 3 of his opera.

*Louise* caught the mood of the moment. At its première at the Opéra-Comique on 2nd February 1900, under the baton of André Messager, it appeared to express the spirit of the new century that was just dawning. Quite early in the run, both the original Louise, Marthe Rioton, and her understudy were ailing and at the eighth performance on 10th April the second understudy, a young Scots soprano called Mary Garden, had to come on in Act 3 as a replacement for Rioton. She was a sensation and on 25th April she was able to sing a complete performance. Charpentier's working-class heroine had found her ideal interpreter and it is difficult to say whether *Louise* made Garden's reputation or Garden made *Louise's*. 'Only in *Louise* was I myself on stage, because she was so like me,' Garden said. 'She was a daring sort of character. She lived hard. She believed in free love. She enjoyed everything about life.' In 1903 *Louise* was heard in both Berlin (with Emmy Destinn) and Vienna (with Mahler conducting). In 1908 the opera reached New York, at the Manhattan Opera with Garden, and in 1909 Louise Edvina sang the title rôle at Covent Garden. A famous production was that conducted by Arturo Toscanini at La Scala in 1923, with Fanny Heldy and Aureliano Pertile. Charpentier wrote a sequel, *Julien*, which was first performed at the Opéra-Comique on 4th June 1913 and had its American première on 26th February 1914

at the Metropolitan, where the singing of Enrico Caruso in the title rôle and Geraldine Farrar as Louise ensured it at least some success. It never really caught on, however, whereas all the tenors and sopranos wanted to appear in *Louise*, and the rôle of the Father attracted such interpreters as Lucien Fugère, Marcel Journet, Robert Radford, Ezio Pinza and Nicola Rossi-Lemeni.

The present recording was one of the potted operas that were popular in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It was presumably thought uncommercial to record the entire score and so the approval of Gustave Charpentier was sought for an abridgement. He even assisted in the production. Three of the best French singers of the day, Ninon Vallin, Georges Thill and André Pernet, all famous exponents of their rôles, were recruited, along with the distinguished conductor Eugène Bigot; and the recording was followed up by a film, made by the director Abel Gance in 1938, in which Thill and Pernet repeated their rôles with the glamorous Grace Moore as Louise. Sadly on that occasion even more of the music was cut, although Charpentier coached Miss Moore – staying on the set throughout the shooting – and the movie was wonderfully atmospheric (it has appeared on video).

**Eugène Bigot**, born in Rennes on 28th February 1888, studied at the Paris Conservatoire with Xavier Leroux, André Gédalge and Paul Vidal. He began his career as chorus master in the first season of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées under Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht (1913-14). During the First World War he won the Croix de Guerre fighting in the French army. His career then advanced steadily: the Swedish Ballet (1920-23), Société des Concerts du Conservatoire ((1923-25), Théâtre des Champs-Élysées (1925-28), French Radio (1928-34), Monte Carlo (1934-35), Concerts Lamoureux (1935-51), Opéra-Comique (1936-47). In 1947 he helped to found the French Radio Orchestra and was associated with it until his death in Paris on 17th July 1965. A composer as well as a conductor, he left innumerable recordings, and was especially valued

as a concerto accompanist.

**Eugénie 'Ninon' Vallin** was born on 9th September 1886 at Montalieu-Vercien and studied first at the Lyon Conservatoire, then at the Paris Conservatoire with Meyriane Héglon, a favourite singer of Saint-Saëns. Initially Vallin appeared as a concert singer, taking part in the first performance of Debussy's *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* in 1911. She made her stage début at the Opéra-Comique in 1912 as Micaëla in *Carmen* and was soon regarded as one of the most brilliant sopranos of the day. Debussy accompanied her in recital and she appeared in many operatic premières. Although her career was anchored in Paris, she was well known in South America and Italy and made guest appearances in most other centres. Having retired from opera in 1943, she continued to give recitals for a time. Later she taught singing. She died on 22nd November 1961 at Millery, near Lyon. Ninon Vallin was a prolific recording artist and took part in a famous set of *Werther* with Georges Thill (Naxos 8.110061-62).

**Georges Thill** was one of the best of a breed once numerous but now extinct, the French dramatic tenor. Born on 14th December 1897 in Paris, he studied at the Conservatoire there before going to the Neapolitan tenor Fernando de Lucia for further lessons. He made his début at the Opéra-Comique in 1919 as Don José in *Carmen* and after consolidating his career in France, began a truly international career in the late 1920s. He was regarded as equally proficient in French and Italian opera and the lighter Wagnerian rôles and had an unusually long operatic career, lasting until 1953. His last concert was given in 1956. This longevity was a tribute to the soundness of his vocal method, which he passed on to his pupils. He died at Lorgues on 17th October 1984. He made many records, some of them regarded as definitive.

**André Pernet** was born on 6th January 1894 at Rambervillers and served in the French army during

World War I. He then studied law before going to the Paris Conservatoire. He made his *début* at Nice in 1921 as Vitellius in Massenet's *Hérodiade* and then sang in various provincial theatres before making his Paris Opéra *début* in 1928. Apart from the 1931-32 season, when he sang exclusively at the Opéra-Comique after a dispute with the Opéra management, he was a pillar of both Parisian houses until 1948, also making guest

appearances in Amsterdam, London, Brussels and North America. In 1949 he retired and he died in Paris on 23rd June 1966. Pernet did not make a large number of records but he can be heard in a set of *Les contes d'Hoffmann* as well as a superb post-war performance of *Boris Godunov*, sung in French under Ernest Ansermet's baton.

**Tully Potter**

## Synopsis

The action takes place in Paris, in 'the present'.

### Act I

A room in a working-class tenement of Louise and her parents. Through the large open window an artist's studio can be seen. **1** As the curtain rises, we hear Julien's voice from his studio terrace; he is singing of Paris in the spring and his love for Louise. She appears at her window and he tells her that he has written to her father asking for her hand but if her parents do not allow them to marry, she must elope with him. Louise says that she loves him, but she loves them too. **2** They recall their first meeting, the objections of her parents and their plans, overheard by Louise's mother, who seizes Louise and shuts her in the kitchen and admonishes Julien through the window. She makes fun of Louise's and Julien's words and calls Julien a drunk and a debaucher. Louise and her mother argue. **3** Her mother is about to hit Louise when the father enters, tired from his day at work. He asks about dinner. He is carrying a letter, which he puts on the table without comment. Louise's mother begins a conversation about lazy people and the father agrees, but it does not carry the same bitterness – he and Louise are obviously fond of one another. Louise asks him to look at the letter, which is from Julien. Her father is well enough disposed to Julien and does not seem set against his daughter's

marriage, but her mother is furious, and after some more harsh words, she slaps Louise. Her father gently asks his daughter to read the paper to him, but when the subject turns to Paris in the spring, Louise is reduced to tears, as the curtain falls.

### Act II

**4** The scene is a wide street in Montmartre. It is five o'clock in an April morning. Various street-people come and go, some cleaning, some setting up stalls to sell their wares, some picking for rags. Eventually Julien and his friends enter, looking for the seamstress's shop where Louise works. The street vendors and workers come and go and Julien again sings of the glories of Paris. Louise and her suspicious mother arrive. When Julien finally gets a chance to ask Louise about the reaction to his letter, he argues with her, accusing her of being too attached to her parents and having no sense of rebellion and adventure. **5** In the seamstress's shop, the girls work and sing. One of them notices that Louise has been crying and suggests that she is in love. Irma, in particular, tells of her own amorous ambitions. They tease Louise with paying too much attention to her mother. **6** Soon Julien's voice is heard from the street; he is singing about love. This amuses the girls, but their reactions annoy Louise, who takes her coat and leaves. The girls look out of the window and see Louise and Julien arm in arm. They laugh in approval.

### Act III

⑦ The scene is set in a small garden on the side of Montmartre. Louise sings to Julien about her love for him and her happiness since they began to live together.

⑧ In a duet they sing of their mutual love, the joys of Paris and their rapture at being free. Bohemians, street people and friends enter the garden and begin decorating, singing and dancing. ⑨ Louise is crowned Queen of Bohemia and Muse of Montmartre. Suddenly her mother appears. She is not interested in quarreling; rather, she tells Louise that her father is sick and needs her to care for him. She promises Julien that Louise can return whenever she pleases, and Louise hesitantly leaves.

### Act IV

⑩ The scene is the same as in the first act, but Julien's studio is no longer visible. Louise is still living with her parents, who have broken their promise that she would be able to return to Julien. Her father is better but he has lost much of his warmth and is now relentlessly bitter,

complaining about the ingratitude of children. Louise easily picks up on his true meaning and gazes longingly out of the window at Paris, whereupon her mother immediately says that they will not consider allowing her to return to Julien. ⑪ Her father sings to her and treats her tenderly and for a moment we remember what a gentle man he was at the start of the opera, but Louise is clearly very unhappy and she reminds her parents of their promise. ⑫ She then affirms her right to be free, as a waltz which was heard during her liberated period with Julien is heard. It is the voice of Paris itself and Louise becomes more and more agitated, begging Paris to set her free. Her father pleads and argues, but Louise's desire for freedom has become too strong – it cannot be subdued. Her father, enraged, chases her around the room and then orders her out of the house. In a burst of joyous desperation, she leaves. Her father, exhausted, calls after her, but when he realises he has lost her for ever, he rages against what he sees as the real villain – Paris – as the curtain falls.

**Keith Anderson**

### 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.

## Producer's Note

This abridged recording of Charpentier's *Louise* was eagerly awaited by music lovers and critics world wide and on its publication, it was immediately awarded the highly prized Grand Prix du disque. Recorded by French Columbia, it was issued throughout Europe as well as in America by Columbia's U. S. affiliate. Despite the fact that less than half of Charpentier's score was recorded, much evocative music is heard on this set and the singing of Vallin, Thill, and Pernet is absolute perfection.

The sound of the recording is quite good for its time, possessing the proper balance between singers and orchestra with only minor distortion during forte passages. It suffers greatly, however, from having been recorded in a studio with no ambient reverberation. Considering the fact that English Columbia had previously made marvelous recordings in the Bayreuth theatre, it is unfortunate that French Columbia did not follow suit by recording this *Louise* at the Opéra-Comique or one of the acoustically favorable concert halls in Paris.

The present transfer was made using several sets of American Columbia pressings which yield slightly quieter surfaces than their French counterparts with no degradation of the recorded sound. In order to soften the edginess of the recording and provide some space around the voices, I have added a slight amount of artificial reverberation. In making this transfer, I have joined the sides together in accordance with the score except for the transition between sides two and three (end of track one). At the conclusion of side two, the orchestra plays a tonic chord which is not in the score. Since this recording had been authorized by the composer, I decided to leave this chord in tact.

Charpentier's sequel to *Louise*, *Julien*, is now completely unknown since it has had no modern day performances. Even during the years following its première, only one aria for the protagonist was ever recorded. In those days, music from other obscure operas was deemed worthy of recording, and one can only wonder why there is nothing else from *Julien*. As a point of interest as well as a curiosity, this sole example of Charpentier's forgotten opera concludes this disc.

**Ward Marston**

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.



ADD

**Playing  
Time  
74:38**

# Gustave CHARPENTIER

(1860-1956)

## Louise (abridged)

Louise ..... Ninon Vallin  
 Julien ..... Georges Thill  
 Le Père ..... André Pernet  
 La Mère ..... Aimée Lecouvreur  
 Irma ..... Christiane Gaudel

Les Choeurs Raugel and Orchestra, Paris

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1-3	Act I	17:37	Appendix:	
4-6	Act II	17:19	JULIEN (Charpentier's sequel to Louise)	
7-9	Act III	15:59	13 La voix de la nuit	5:45
10-12	Act IV	17:58	Sung by Maurice Dutreix	

Archivist & Restoration Producer: Ward Marston  
 Special thanks to Michael Gray, Andrew Karzas and Peter Lack

[www.naxos.com](http://www.naxos.com)

A detailed track list can be found in the booklet  
 Cover Image: Poster for *Louise* (detail) by C. Rochegrosse  
 The Art Archive / Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, Paris / Dagli Orti (A)



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