



Beniamino GIGLI

**Camden and New York
Recordings 1923-25**

CATALANI

DE CURTIS

DONIZETTI

FLOTOW

GOUNOD

SAINT-SAËNS

Beniamino Gigli (1890-1957)

The Gigli Edition Vol. 3

Camden and New York Recordings 1923-25

Beniamino Gigli was in the cast of the first opera I heard when I was seven years old. It was a matinee of *La gioconda* at the old Met: I have quite a clear recollection of Gigli singing *Cielo e mar!*, and an even clearer memory of the rounds of applause that it evoked. The next time I heard him in the theatre was as Radames when he returned briefly to the Met ten years later. I last heard him on stage in Rome in 1945 as Alfredo and Cavaradossi at the Teatro Adriano, shortly after VE Day. Backstage after the *Tosca* performance, I was struck both by his gratitude that two American soldiers had taken the trouble to meet him, and by his evident disappointment that they were the only two. Having heard him when he was 39 and again at 49 and at 55, I found him surprisingly consistent vocally. By 1945 his voice had darkened, but even in that late (for him) Cavaradossi, a performance that earned him an encore, he retained full command of his *mezza voce*, but when he put pressure on the voice, for example when he sang out fully, there was a suspicion of a beat in his tones.

Gigli came first to the Victor studios six weeks after his Metropolitan debut, which took place on 26th November 1920, when he sang Faust in a revival and new production of Boito's *Mefistofele*. That rôle had two years earlier provided the occasion of his debut at La Scala with Nazzareno De Angelis as Mefistofele and Toscanini on the podium. An aria from that score, *Dai campi, dai prati*, was the first disc he made in the United States. The fine quality of his voice, the savvy of phrasing, are not quite as we have come to expect on his later records, but the range of colour and the distinctive timbre, even in this occasionally bumpy account of Boito's aria, are harbingers of future treasures. The following month Gigli recorded Faust's aria from the Epilogue of *Mefistofele*, and it is one of

his most beautiful records.

Cavaradossi was Gigli's fourth rôle at the Metropolitan, first assumed on 10th December 1920 when he was partnered by Destinn. He had sung the part of Cavaradossi as early as 1915 at the Carlo Felice, Genova, and one would assume that the rôle might have held a central place in his repertory at the Metropolitan. That it did not was because Gigli and Maria Jeritza, then the reigning *Tosca* there, did not get on well together on stage. At the *Tosca* on 10th February 1925 Jeritza announced during a curtain call that 'Gigli, he not nice to me'. Apparently she had tried to galvanise the tenor into a more responsive dramatic interpretation, efforts he forcibly resisted. They never appeared together again.

The repertory of Gigli's recordings took two directions during his first seasons in America. His debut at the Met preceded by less than a month Caruso's final performance. After the elder tenor's death during that summer of 1921, it was natural to want to establish the newcomer Gigli as next in line, the 'Italian tenor' of the moment, hence his recording of *Vesti la giubba* some years before he tackled Canio in the theatre. The other Caruso-like direction of Gigli's recorded repertory is found among the sizeable number of Italian and Neapolitan songs represented, even though the two tenors selections rarely overlap. These ditties, by composers such as De Curtis, Carnevali, Tagliaferri and Buzzi-Peccia, were a feature of the concert programmes of the day. Like his predecessor, Gigli treats this material without condescension, approaching it with care and communicable pleasure. His rhythmic alacrity (when he wants to use it) in *Funiculi, funiculà*, in spite of a glum-sounding chorus, is delightful, and his skill at suggesting the wry pathos of Buzzi-Peccia's *Povero*

Pulcinella earns him high marks. A curiosity is the vocal treatment with an Italian text of the cello solo *Le cygne* from Saint-Saëns's *Carnaval des animaux*.

Returning to the first category of these early recordings, they tended to reflect the rôles he was either currently undertaking or soon to sing at the Met. In the company of Muzio, Gigli sang Walter in Catalani's *Loreley*, and his recording of *Nel verde maggio* is a souvenir of that production. This grateful aria with its unexpected modulations affords the tenor a chance for polished lyricism; one wonders why more singers in search of unhackneyed repertory have not taken advantage of it. The two duets with Bori commemorate the Met's revival of *Roméo et Juliette* on 25th November 1922. Here Gigli's French diction, if not

exactly native, is superior to that of most Italian tenors, and he almost matches the soprano's refinement. The *O paradiso*, sustained with magnificent breadth was put on wax a little more than a month before the Met's revival of Meyerbeer's *L'Africana* in March 1923 that also featured Ponselle as Sélîka. That staple of Caruso's, *M'appari*, suited Gigli in particular with his spontaneity of feeling and his tasteful phrasing. His acoustic version preceded the Met's revival of Flotow's *Martha* with Frances Alda by some months.

The present collection also includes arias from *L'elisir d'amore* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

© William Ashbrook

Edited from the original notes

Producer's Note

The present volume is the third in a series devoted to Beniamino Gigli's "singles" - his song and aria recordings not issued as part of complete opera sets. The aim of the series is to include every Gigli recording released at the time, as well as every published alternate take and, wherever available, unpublished takes. The sides here are presented in the order in which they were recorded.

Those acquainted with the discography by Peel and Holohan published in *The Record Collector* in 1990 may question the absence in this volume of several unpublished acoustics (Items 63, 68 and 71). The logs indicate that all takes of these sides (as well as the final scene from *La Bohème* with Bori, not mentioned in the discography) were destroyed shortly after they were recorded. In addition, the recording dates for the two *Roméo* duets and the song *Good-bye, Marie* have been corrected in the present listing.

One other divergence from the discography concerns the take numbers of the two 1925 *Lucia di Lammermoor* sides (which were allotted Victor number 6511, but were not issued by that label in the United States*). Based upon the numbers found at nine o'clock in the runout area surrounding the label, it had been thought that the issued takes were 1 and 2 for *Tombe degli' avi miei* and *Tu che a Dio*, respectively. However, test pressings of these sides with the original matrix number and take information inscribed in the label area reveal that the takes are, in fact, 2 and 1. (The unpublished Take 1 for the first side is included in this set.)

The listener may notice that the acoustic sides recorded in New York are not as "forward" and full-bodied as those done at Victor's headquarters in Camden; Gigli's voice in these items sounds comparatively thin and strident. (A similar problem afflicts his two 1925 New York electrics; could the studio have been at fault?) The 1925 Camden recordings were made less than a month after Victor converted to the electrical process, and their primitive quality suggests why the microphone was not at first universally hailed as an improvement over the acoustic horn. Considerable care has been taken to pitch the records at the proper speeds, based on Gigli's known transposition habits as well as conclusions inferred from the speeds of other contemporaneous recordings.

The selections on the current volume were originally issued in 1996 as part of Romophone 82003-2 ("Beniamino Gigli - The Complete Victor Recordings, Volume I: 1921-25"). In remastering my original transfers, I have tried to remove some of the clicks and pops that remained (both manually via digital editing and through the use of the CEDAR declipping module) and have made adjustments to the equalization of each track.

Mark Obert-Thorn

* There is anecdotal evidence that Victor 6511 may have been released in South America.

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.

- MEYERBEER:**
- ① **L'Africana: O paradiso (Act 4)** 3:41
Recorded 7th February 1923
in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: C-27531-2
First issued on Victor 74804
- CATALANI:**
- ② **Loreley: Nel verde maggio (Act 1)** 2:28
Recorded 8th February 1923
in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: B-27533-1
First issued on Victor 975
- GOUNOD:**
- ③ **Romé et Juliette: Ange adorable (Act 1)** 4:14
Lucrezia Bori, soprano
Recorded 28th March 1923
in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: C-27714-1
First issued on HMV AGSB 58
- GOUNOD:**
- ④ **Romé et Juliette: Ah! ne fuis pas encore (Act 2)** 2:13
Lucrezia Bori, soprano
Recorded 28th March 1923
in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: B-27715-3
First issued on Victor 87581
- SAINT-SAËNS:**
- ⑤ **Canto del cigno** 2:36
A vocal treatment of *Le cygne* from
Carnaval des animaux
Recorded 21st May 1923 in New York
Matrix: B-28018-2
First issued on Victor 1025
- FLOTOW:**
- ⑥ **Martha: M'appari (Act 3)** 3:40
Recorded 4th June 1923 in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: C-27995-1
First issued on Victor 6446
- BUZZI-PECCIA:**
- ⑦ **Paquita** 2:47
Recorded 29th October 1923
in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: B-27996-4
First issued on Victor 1025
- DENZA:**
- ⑧ **Funiculi, funiculà** 2:40
The Pongoni Chorus
Recorded 26th November 1924 in New York
Matrix: B-31457-3
First issued on Victor 1064
- BUZZI-PECCIA:**
- ⑨ **Povero Pulcinella** 2:50
Recorded 26th November 1924 in New York
Matrix: B-31477-2
First issued on Victor 1064
- DE CURTIS:**
- ⑩ **Sentinella** 2:33
Recorded 7th April 1925 in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: BVE-32142-2
First issued on Victor 1084
- DE CURTIS:**
- ⑪ **Sto penzanno 'a Maria** 3:31
Recorded 7th April 1925 in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: BVE-32143-2
First issued on Victor 1084

- CARNEVALI:**
- 12 **Come, love with me** 2:32
Recorded 9th April 1925 in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: BVE-32148-2
First issued on Victor 1096
- TAGLIAFERRI:**
- 13 **Mandulinata a Napule** 3:12
Recorded 9th April 1925 in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: BVE-28815-4
First issued on Victor 1157
- DONIZETTI:**
- 14 **L'elisir d'amore: Quanto è bella (Act 1)** 2:53
Recorded 10th April 1925 in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: BVE-32500-2
First issued on Victor 1157
- DONIZETTI:**
- 15 **Lucia di Lammermoor:
Tombe degl'avi miei (Act 3)** 4:55
Recorded 10th April 1925 in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: CVE-32501-1
Unpublished on 78 rpm
- DONIZETTI:**
- 16 **Lucia di Lammermoor:
Tombe degl'avi miei (Act 3)** 4:38
Recorded 10th April 1925 in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: CVE-32501-2
First issued on HMV DB 870
- DONIZETTI:**
- 17 **Lucia di Lammermoor:
Tu che a Dio spiegasti l'ali (Act 3)** 3:49
Recorded 10th April 1925 in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: CVE-32502-1
First issued on HMV DB 870
- DE CURTIS:**
- 18 **Good-bye, Marie** 3:27
Recorded 10th April 1925 in Camden, New Jersey
Matrix: BVE-32149-4
First issued on Victor 1096
- DE CRESCENZO:**
- 19 **Quanno 'a femmena vo'** 2:23
Recorded 18th November 1925 in New York
Matrix: BVE-33882-1
First issued on Victor 1134
- DI CAPUA:**
- 20 **Maria, Mari** 3:38
Recorded 18th November 1925 in New York
Matrix: BVE-28019-4
First issued on Victor 1134
- Tracks 1- 4, 6, 7 and 10-18
Orchestra conducted by Rosario Bourdon
- Tracks 5, 8, 9, 19 and 20
Orchestra conducted by Nathaniel Shilkret



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ADD

Beniamino Gigli

The Gigli Edition, Vol. 3

Camden and New York Recordings 1923-25

Playing Time 64:41

- 1 MEYERBEER: *L'Africana*: O paradiso
- 2 CATALANI: *Loreley*: Nel verde maggio
- 3 GOUNOD: *Roméo et Juliette*: Ange adorable
- 4 GOUNOD: *Roméo et Juliette*: Ah! ne fuis pas encore
- 5 SAINT-SAËNS: Canto del cigno
- 6 FLOTOW: *Martha*: M'appari
- 7 BUZZI-PECCIA: Paquita
- 8 DENZA: Funiculì, funiculà
- 9 BUZZI-PECCIA: Povero Pulcinella
- 10 DE CURTIS: Sentinella
- 11 DE CURTIS: Sto penzanno 'a Maria
- 12 CARNEVALI: Come, love with me
- 13 TAGLIAFERRI: Mandulinata a Napule
- 14 DONIZETTI: *L'elisir d'amore*: Quanto è bella
- 15 DONIZETTI: *Lucia di Lammermoor*:
Tombe degl'avi miei (unpublished on 78rpm)
- 16 DONIZETTI: *Lucia di Lammermoor*:
Tombe degl'avi miei
- 17 DONIZETTI: *Lucia di Lammermoor*:
Tu che a Dio spiegasti l'ali
- 18 DE CURTIS: Good-bye, Marie
- 19 DE CRESCENZO: Quanno 'a femmena vo'
- 20 DI CAPUA: Maria, Mari

The present volume is the third in a series devoted to Beniamino Gigli's 'singles' - his song and aria recordings not issued as part of complete opera sets. The aim of the series is to include every Gigli recording released at the time, as well as every published alternate take and, wherever available, unpublished takes. The sides here are presented in the order in which they were recorded. For this Naxos series, restoration engineer Mark Obert-Thorn has remastered his original, critically-acclaimed Romophone transfers, cleaning them up further and re-doing some tracks in their entirety. Of special note in this third volume are Gigli's recordings of *Nel verde maggio*, a souvenir from the Met's production of Catalani's *Loreley*, in which he sang Walter; and a vocal treatment with an Italian text of the cello solo *Le cygne* from Saint-Saëns's *Carnaval des animaux*.

MADE IN
THE EU

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn
Special thanks to Ward Marston, Lawrence Holdridge, Jim Peters,
David Norbeck and Mark Ricaldone · Previously released on Romophone

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A complete track list can be found in the booklet
Cover image: Gigli as Walter in Catalani's *Loreley*, Met Opera House, NY,
March 1922 (from the Mark Ricaldone photograph collection of Beniamino Gigli)

