



**Rosa  
PONSELLE**

**American Recordings  
1923-1929, Volume 3**

**VERDI**

**SPONTINI**

**SCHUBERT**

**MASSENET**

**New restorations by Ward Marston**

## Rosa Ponselle (1897-1981)

### American Recordings 1923-1929, Vol. 3

By 1926 the electrical recording process was firmly established as the industry standard. Its expanded frequency and dynamic range produced a more realistic sound, and allowed for subtle nuances in interpretation. Furthermore, the use of microphones allowed artists greater flexibility in performing. In the case of Rosa Ponselle, Aida Favia-Artsay noted that 'on the electric Victors her voice and dramatic perception are at their highest peak'.

In the Met's 1925-26 season Rosa Ponselle made her first appearance as Séliska in Meyerbeer's *L'Africana* with a cast which featured Gigli, De Luca and Rothier, conducted by Tullio Serafin. Among the comments she wrote about each rôle in my collection of Met programmes, Ponselle noted that *L'Africana* was 'a great box office attraction; good theatre ... but not one of my favorites'. *La Vestale* which she sang on 12th November was another matter. Her comment written on the programme of the first Met performance was: 'A classic - loved it'. The audience and critics were also in agreement. Lawrence Gilman of the *Herald Tribune* wrote: 'Here was the youngest vestal who was obviously young. Here was a singer who could sing Spontini's long, gravely sculptured melodies with the required sense of line and dignity of style.' Half a year later Ponselle made her classic recordings of the two *Vestale* arias. (In 1933, at the first Maggio Musicale in Florence, she performed the rôle of Giulia in her only appearances in Italy.) Many years later Ponselle commented in an interview that 'Gatti wanted me to sing Norma, but I wasn't ready, so they gave me *Vestale*. I didn't know they were using it as a forerunner for *Norma*. I don't see any resemblance other than the classic line ... but the

range was much more comfortable.'

Ponselle went on tour with the Met, and closed the season on 5th May 1926 in Cleveland singing Aida, with Giovanni Martinelli as her Radames. Less than two weeks later the two singers met again in Camden where they recorded the complete 'Tomb Scene'. Their abridged 1924 acoustic recording, available on Naxos 8.111138, omitted the rôle of Amneris and the chorus. Ponselle regarded Aida as 'the greatest opera ever written', and recorded Aida's two solo arias, *Ritorna vincitor* and *O patria mia*, that same week.

Ponselle and Lauri-Volpi (with De Luca, Matzenauer and Pinza) opened the following Met season with a gala performance of *La Vestale* on 1st November 1926. On 29th December she gave her first performance as Fiora in Montemezzi's *L'Amore dei Tre Re*. Three days later, on New Year's Day, Ponselle made her broadcast début on the Victor Talking Machine Hour.

This record also contains a number of songs that often appeared on Ponselle's recital programmes. Two of them were Caruso favourites – 'A *vucchella* and *Luna d'Estate*. Most agree that Ponselle's versions are quite worthy to stand alongside those of her mentor. A curiosity is the *Ständchen*, recorded as a duet with her sister Carmela. A collector in Cincinnati found two unpublished takes of this selection, both of which were damaged. The track here is a composite of the two. Interestingly enough, both sisters firmly denied having recorded together for Victor.

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- VERDI: Aida: Tomb Scene (Act IV, Scene 2)**  
with Giovanni Martinelli, tenor,  
Elsie Baker, mezzo-soprano, and chorus
- ① *La fatal pietra* 6:47  
17th May 1926; BVE 35459-3 & 35460-3  
(Victor 1744 A & B)
- ② *O terra addio* 5:43  
17th May 1926; BVE 35461-1 & 35462-2  
(Victor 1745 A & B)
- SPONTINI: La Vestale:**
- ③ *Tu che invoco* 4:34  
18th May 1926; CVE 35464-I (Victor 6605 A)
- SPONTINI: La Vestale:**
- ④ *O nume tutelâr* 3:30  
18th May 1926; CVE 35465-I (Victor 6605 B)
- SPONTINI: La Vestale:**
- ⑤ *O nume tutelâr* 3:30  
18th May 1926; CVE 35465-2  
(unpublished on 78rpm)
- TOSTI:**
- ⑥ *'A vucchella 'Arietta di Posillipo'* 3:10  
18th May 1926; BVE 35466-2 (Victor 1164-A)
- TOSTI:**
- ⑦ *Luna d'estate* 2:32  
18th May 1926; BVE 35467-2 (Victor 1164 B)
- MASSENET:**
- ⑧ *Élégie* 3:46  
with Lennartz, cello  
19th May 1926; CVE 35469-I (Victor 6599B)
- MASSENET:**
- ⑨ *Élégie* 3:48  
with Lennartz, cello  
19th May 1926; CVE 35469-3 (Victor 6599B)
- GOUNOD:**
- ⑩ *Ave Maria* 4:35  
'Meditation on J.S. Bach's Prelude in C'  
with Alexander Schmidt, violin  
19th May 1926; CVE 35470-2 (Victor 6599 A)
- SCHUBERT:**
- ⑪ *Ständchen* 4:37  
with Carmela Ponselle, mezzo-soprano  
19th May 1926; CVE 35471-1 & 2  
(unpublished on 78rpm)
- VERDI: Aida:**
- ⑫ *Ritorna vincitor* 4:54  
20th May 1926; CVE 29063-6  
(unpublished on 78rpm)
- VERDI: Aida:**
- ⑬ *O patria mia* 4:48  
20th May 1926; CVE 29061-6  
(unpublished on 78rpm)
- RIMSKY-KORSAKOV: Aida:**
- ⑭ *The Nightingale and the Rose* 3:29  
with Clement Barone, flute  
2nd June 1927; BVE 38857-2 (Victor 1456 B)
- TOSTI:**
- ⑮ *Serenade* 3:45  
With Francis Lapitino, harp  
2nd June 1927; CVE 29879-5 (Victor 6711 A)

- TOSTI:**
- 16 *Good-bye* 3:41  
13th June 1927; CVE 29876-6 (Victor 6711 B)
- KAHN:**
- 17 *Ave Maria* 3:37  
16th June 1927; BVE 38856-6 (Victor 1456 A)
- VERDI: Ernani**
- 18 *Ernani! Ernani, involami* 4:30  
16th June 1927; CVE 29062-5  
(unpublished on 78rpm)

Tracks 1-7; 12-13 and 18: sung in Italian  
Tracks 8-9: sung in French  
Tracks 14-16: sung in English  
Tracks 10 and 17: sung in Latin  
Track 11: sung in German

Tracks 11-16 with orchestra conducted by  
Giulio Setti; all other tracks with orchestra  
conducted by Rosario Bourdon

### Producer's Note

This disc and its companion volume Naxos 8.111141 contains every known recording made by Rosa Ponselle for the Victor Talking Machine Company between 1926 and 1929. There are a total of eight alternative takes, of which only two were originally released on 78 rpm discs. In addition, two unpublished titles - Schubert's *Ständchen* (with Carmela Ponselle) and *O patria mia* from *Aida* - are included. Test pressings of these unpublished recordings were in the hands of a private collector, and a tape copy of these recordings was made for Rosa Ponselle in the 1960s. When this tape was made, the original test pressings were played at an incorrect speed (78 instead of 75 rpm), resulting in keys a semitone too high. (This tape was, in fact, used for an LP transfer which was also pitched incorrectly.) Although the whereabouts of the original test pressings are presently unknown, the tape copy made for Ponselle has been used, and the speed has been correctly altered to play at the correct pitch. The listener will notice from the discographic information that there are two versions of the Schubert *Ständchen*. On the original tape recording of Take 1 part of the last section of the song was accidentally erased, and Take 2 contained a severe crack which extended halfway into the original test pressing. Considering these flaws, I have combined the two takes to produce a complete performance.

I should also like to call the listener's attention to several defects on the original records. In the 'Tomb Scene' from *Aida*, one will notice severe sonic deterioration near the end of the third side (about two minutes into Track 2). I have no explanation for this fault on the original recording, and have tried to minimise this as much as possible. On several other discs a peculiar high pitched whistling sound appears at the end of a side. This sound is the result of the wax master cooling too quickly during the record cutting. As these recordings were made on heated wax masters, any ensuing delay resulted in the wax cooling before the recording was completed. This phenomenon only seems to occur in recordings made during the late 1920s (principally on Victors and Polydors, and occasionally HMVs). With the use of subtle equalisation and a notch filter, I have been able to mitigate this effect.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that Ponselle sings Tosti's *Serenade* in the key of E major. Although she recorded this song in the original key of F major on her 1924 acoustic recording, she transposed it a semitone below score pitch when she re-recorded it in 1927.

Ward Marston



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MADE IN  
THE EU



8.111140

ADD

Rosa Ponselle (1897-1981)

American Recordings 1923-1929, Vol. 3

Playing Time 75:18
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- 1 **VERDI: Aida: La fatal pietra** <sup>1</sup>
- 2 **VERDI: Aida: O terra addio** <sup>1</sup>
- 3 **SPONTINI: La Vestale: Tu che invoco**
- 4 **SPONTINI: La Vestale: O nume tutelar**
- 5 **SPONTINI: La Vestale: O nume tutelar** \*
- 6 **TOSTI: 'A vucchella 'Arietta di Posillipo'**
- 7 **TOSTI: Luna d'estate**
- 8 **MASSENET: Élégie** <sup>2</sup>
- 9 **MASSENET: Élégie** <sup>2</sup>
- 10 **GOUNOD: Ave Maria 'Meditation on J.S. Bach's Prelude in C'** <sup>3</sup>
- 11 **SCHUBERT: Ständchen** \* <sup>4</sup>
- 12 **VERDI: Aida: Ritorna vincitor** \*
- 13 **VERDI: Aida: O patria mia** \*
- 14 **RIMSKY-KORSAKOV: The Nightingale and the Rose** <sup>5</sup>
- 15 **TOSTI: Serenade** <sup>6</sup>
- 16 **TOSTI: Good-bye**
- 17 **KAHN: Ave Maria**
- 18 **VERDI: Ernani: Ernani! Ernani, involami** \*

\* previously unpublished on 78rpm

<sup>1</sup> with Giovanni Martinelli, tenor and Elsie Baker, mezzo-soprano

<sup>2</sup> with Lennartz, cello

<sup>3</sup> with Alexander Schmidt, violin

<sup>4</sup> with Carmela Ponselle, mezzo-soprano

<sup>5</sup> with Clement Barone, flute

<sup>6</sup> with Francis Lapitino, harp

Described by Maria Callas as 'the greatest singer of us all', the American-born Rosa Ponselle (1897-1981) is acknowledged as one of the outstanding dramatic sopranos of the twentieth century. Without any previous experience of the operatic stage, she made her Metropolitan debut in Verdi's *La forza del destino* opposite Caruso in 1918. Following her enormous success, she became the Metropolitan's leading soprano, appearing in twenty-one rôles throughout her career. This third disc of Ponselle's 1923-1929 American recordings features solo arias from the great Verdi operas, the complete 'Tomb Scene' from *Aida* and a number of songs that often appeared in Ponselle's recital programmes. Schubert's *Ständchen* is a composite of two takes unpublished on 78rpm found by a collector in Cincinnati.

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Ward Marston  
 Special thanks to Elayne Duke, Lawrence Holdridge, Peter Lack, Bill Park and David Terry

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

A complete track list can be found in the booklet  
 Cover image: Rosa Ponselle in *La Gioconda* (Private Collection)

