



**John
McCORMACK**

**1916-18
Acoustic Recordings**

WAGNER

MÉHUL

BALFE

HERBERT

NOVELLO

With Fritz Kreisler, violin

New restorations by Ward Marston

- MATTEI:**
1 *Non è ver* 3:55
 9th May 1916; C-17651-1 (Victor 74486)
- RAFF:**
2 *Serenade* 2:32
 with **Fritz Kreisler**, *violin*
 10th May 1916; B-17654-2 (Victor 87258)
- OFFENBACH: Les contes d'Hoffmann:**
3 *Barcarolle* 2:33
 with **Fritz Kreisler**, *violin*
 10th May 1916; B-17655-1 (Victor 87254)
- WAGNER: Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg:**
4 *Morning was Gleaming (Preislied)* 3:57
 10th May 1916; C-17656-1 (Victor 74479)
- KREISLER:**
5 *Cradle Song 1915* 3:16
 11th May 1916; B-17672-2 (Victor 64606)
- BALFE: The Bohemian Girl:**
6 *Then You'll Remember Me* 3:11
 11th May 1916; B-14677-2 (Victor 64599)
- RAY:**
7 *The Sunshine of Your Smile* 3:00
 20th September 1916; B-18383-1 (Victor 64622)
- SILÉSU:**
8 *Love, Here is My Heart* 3:11
 20th September 1916; B-18384-2 (Victor 64623)
- MARGETSON:**
9 *Tommy Lad* 2:27
 20th September 1916; B-18385-1 (Victor 64630)
- BALL: The Isle of Dreams**
10 *When Irish Eyes are Smiling* 3:10
 20th September 1916; B-18387-2 (Victor 64631)
- FAURÉ:**
11 *Crucifix* 3:11
 with **Reinald Werrenrath**, *baritone*
 21st September 1916; B-18391-1
 (Unpublished on 78rpm)
- KEY:**
12 *The Star Spangled Banner* 2:49
 with **Harry Macdonough & Lambert Murphy**,
tenors; **Reinald Werrenrath**, *baritone*;
 William F. Hooley, *bass*
 29th March 1917; B-19534-3 (Victor 64664)
- HERBERT: Eileen:**
13 *Ireland, My Sireland* 2:43
 with **Dominic Melillo**, *harp*
 5th April 1917; B-19447-1 (Victor 64665)
- HERBERT: Eileen:**
14 *Eileen (Alanna Asthore)* 2:20
 with **Dominic Melillo**, *harp*
 5th April 1917; B-19448-2 (Victor 64666)
- SANDERSON:**
15 *The Trumpet Call* 2:23
 7th June 1917; B-20016-2 (Victor 64733)

- NOVELLO:**
- 16 *Keep the Home Fires Burning* 3:11 23 *Champs paternels* 4:24
7th June 1917; B-20017-2 (Victor 64696) 23rd October 1917; C-20898-1 (Victor 74564)
- ELLIOT:**
- 17 *There's a Long, Long Trail* 3:24 24 *The Lord is My Light* 3:18
7th June 1917; B-20018-1 (Victor 64694) 23rd October 1917; B-20899-1 (Victor 64726)
- LÖHR:**
- 18 *Any Place is Heaven if You Are Near Me* 2:51 25 *God Be With Our Boys Tonight* 3:27
7th June 1917; B-20019-2 (Victor 64699) 5th April 1918; B-21663-1 (Victor 64773)
- FERRARI:**
- 19 *The Rainbow of Love* 2:54 26 *Calling Me Home to You* 2:26
with **Rosario Bourdon**, *celeste* 30th April 1918; B-21808-2 (Victor 64803)
8th June 1917; B-20021-2 (Victor 64732)
- FAURÉ:**
- 20 *Crucifix* 3:11
with **Reinald Werrenrath**, *baritone*
8th June 1917; B-18391-3 (Victor 64712)
- PIANTADOSI:**
- 21 *Send Me Away With a Smile* 2:49
7th September 1917 B-20546-1 (Victor 64741)
- PIANTADOSI:**
- 22 *Send Me Away With a Smile* 3:20
23rd October 1917; B-20546-3 (Victor 64741)

MÉHUL: Joseph en Égypte:

23 *Champs paternels* 4:24
23rd October 1917; C-20898-1 (Victor 74564)

ALLITSON:

24 *The Lord is My Light* 3:18
23rd October 1917; B-20899-1 (Victor 64726)

SANDERSON:

25 *God Be With Our Boys Tonight* 3:27
5th April 1918; B-21663-1 (Victor 64773)

DOREL:

26 *Calling Me Home to You* 2:26
30th April 1918; B-21808-2 (Victor 64803)

Tracks 1, 4-6:

with The Victor Orchestra • Walter B. Rogers

Tracks 2 & 3: with Edwin Schneider, piano

Tracks 7-11:

with The Victor Orchestra • Rosario Bourdon

Tracks 12, 15-20, 22-26:

with The Victor Orchestra • Joseph Pasternack

Tracks 13-14:

with The Victor Orchestra • Victor Herbert

Track 21:

with The Victor Orchestra • Edward King

Track 1 sung in Italian

Tracks 2-22 and 24-26 sung in English

Track 23 sung in French

With thanks to John Bolig, Lawrence F. Holdridge, Jeffrey Miller and Paul Worth

John McCormack (1884-1945)

The McCormack Edition Vol. 7

“Of all the great singers of the twentieth century”, Desmond Shaw-Taylor wrote nearly five decades ago, “John McCormack was the most versatile. Opera and oratorio, Handel and Mozart, Brahms and Rachmaninov, Irish folk songs and ballads of simple sentiment: in all these he was at home”. The critic has indicated more than one major area of vocal art, and it is noteworthy that McCormack is an extraordinary vocalist in all of them. Good in opera and oratorio, he was unique in the world of song, and the present set of recordings gives us ample evidence of his superiority in this area of vocal art.

John McCormack was born on 14th June 1884 in the small Irish town of Athlone. He received his first schooling there, and later graduated from Summerhill College in County Sligo. 1902 finds him in Dublin, ostensibly to take an examination for a civil service position, but by this time the young man had his own ideas about his future. Those other ideas were musical. He joined the Palestrina Choir of Dublin’s Roman Catholic cathedral, where he came to the attention of Vincent O’Brien, the cathedral’s music director and one of the capital’s leading musicians. O’Brien soon took the young chorister in hand, to prepare him for the Feis Ceoil, a prestigious musical event. When McCormack won the gold medal for tenor singing in 1903, he immediately became the object of much public attention. The gold medal also gave the budding tenor a confidence he had not enjoyed before; a musical career was now a realistic goal and the young man seized every opportunity to reach that goal. The following year he accepted an invitation to join the performers in the Irish Village at the St. Louis World’s Fair in the United States; the fledgling tenor must have felt very international indeed.

Even more meaningful international experience came in 1905, when McCormack travelled to Milan to study under Vincenzo Sabatini. (The maestro was the father of Rafael Sabatini, the popular writer of *Scaramouche* and other romance novels.) McCormack was an eager pupil and advanced rapidly; early in the following year Sabatini judged him ready for his début

in opera. This took place at the Teatro Chiabrera in Savona, on the Gulf of Genoa; the date was 13th January 1906 and the opera was Mascagni’s *L’amico Fritz*. He was kindly received, although his attempt to portray a middle-aged man was less than convincing. The singer would always be uncomfortable in operatic costume, and the total inappropriateness of this first rôle was perhaps a foreshadowing of his always feeling ill at ease on stage.

If McCormack thought that this modestly successful début would open the doors to his desired career in Italy, failed auditions at La Scala soon disabused him of the notion. He was forced to return to London, where Covent Garden proved to be just as impenetrable. It took the powerful influence of Sir John Murray Scott, a wealthy patron of the arts, to arrange for McCormack’s 13th October 1907 London opera début. Again, the chosen rôle, this time Turridu in *Cavalleria rusticana*, was completely inappropriate; now the young Irishman had to assume the *persona* of a hotblooded Sicilian, resulting in another stretch of credibility. Critical reception in London was positive, if muted, but McCormack had his foothold in Covent Garden, and at 23 he was the youngest tenor ever engaged by that opera house. Until the outbreak of war in 1914, McCormack sang in every Covent Garden season, appearing in such operas as *Lakmé*, *Rigoletto*, *La Sonnambula*, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. His final London performances would be in Boito’s *Mefistofele*.

When Oscar Hammerstein I travelled to Europe in 1909 to recruit singers for his Manhattan Opera House in New York, McCormack became one of the singers in that troupe. He made his American opera début at the Manhattan in November 1909, as Alfredo in *La traviata*. Critics praised his vocalism – McCormack was an excellent Verdi tenor – but it is amusing to notice that one reviewer pointed out the singer was so ineffective on stage he made the unspeakable Alfredo “almost likeable”.

The Metropolitan Opera, not liking the competition, soon bought out Hammerstein, and McCormack found himself singing for other opera companies, including

Philadelphia and Chicago. He continued to be well received on the lyric stage, but when he began to do recitals, public reaction was unprecedented; he was such a phenomenon in concert that his career immediately took a new direction. After those first seasons, his work in opera quickly diminished while his concert appearances (along with his recordings) became virtually his entire professional life. He was richly rewarded for this change in career: not only was he soon earning a million dollars a year, he also enjoyed a popularity that even by today's standards continues to impress. What other concert singer could give twelve New York recitals in a single season, to standing room only audiences, and without repeating a single item in any of the programmes? He had not been long in the United States when it became clear that John McCormack was the greatest concert attraction the country had ever known.

McCormack and his family stayed in America for the duration of the war, and as that conflict came to a close they decided formally to take American citizenship. It was a step that would cost the singer dearly, as people throughout the British Empire saw this to be an act of disloyalty. They protested fiercely against the tenor's appearances. He was forced to cancel a planned concert tour of Australia in 1920, and it was not until 1924 that he dared to sing in London again. Returning from the aborted Australian tour, and not willing to diminish his prestige further by retreating to America, he decided to continue his career on the Continent. From 1920 to 1923 McCormack would give a series of memorable recitals in Paris, Berlin, Prague, and Vienna, with more prestige coming from his final appearances in opera, this time at Monte Carlo. The most memorable of these productions was a newly edited *La foire de Sorotchintzi* of Mussorgsky, staged in 1923. McCormack sang the part of Gritzko; it was his last rôle on the operatic stage.

Three years after this defining moment in his career, McCormack went on a recital tour of Asia. In 1930 he starred in one of Hollywood's first sound films, *Song O' My Heart*, appearing opposite the young Maureen O'Sullivan, then just beginning her career in cinema. Recitals in England, Ireland, and the United States filled most of the next decade, until November

1938, when he sang his farewell concert in London's Albert Hall. The outbreak of World War II led to fund-raising tours and BBC broadcasts in support of the war effort, and he continued to record for HMV until 1942. The following year he retired to Ireland where, on 16th September, 1945, at his home just outside Dublin, the singer died.

Our opening selection, the only item sung in Italian, reminds us of McCormack's early vocal training in Italy, where the young student quickly absorbed his second language, all with the goal of establishing an operatic career in that country. In a matter of months he was fluent, and he retained his mastery of Italian throughout his life. Here, in Tito Mattei's *Non è ver*, his command of that language is made even lovelier by the beauty of his tone and the equally beautiful Gaelic vowels that he brings to his pronunciation. This recording makes us think of McCormack's early training and his attempts to establish an Italian career, it also reminds us that by the time the singer made the present set of recordings, his career in opera was largely over. The enormous success he had found as a concert singer led him virtually to abandon the lyric stage; by 1917 he had reduced his appearances to one or two performances at New York's Metropolitan Opera.

One of the items in this set, however, documents McCormack's major operatic obsession and points to a direction in his career he dearly wished for, had circumstances been different. This document is the *Prize Song* from Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*, known here in English translation as *Morning Was Gleaming*. From the earliest days of his career in London, he was fascinated by Jean de Reszke, the legendary tenor who had retired from opera a bare two years before McCormack's London début. The young Irishman may have just missed his Polish idol, but the memory of his great Wagnerian interpretations was still fresh in the memory of London opera-goers, whose recollections easily went back to his first Tristan there in 1896. One of these opera-goers was the prominent socialite Lady deGrey. Lily McCormack remembered her husband listening "spellbound" as Lady deGrey took him through de Reszke's Wagnerian rôles. By his early Covent Garden days, McCormack's obsession had evolved into his personal dream, and it is clear from this

1916 recording that he very much wanted to turn that dream into a reality. (He had recorded the *Prize Song* a year earlier, accompanied by Fritz Kreisler's violin, but it remained unpublished.)

Other documentation from the period makes McCormack's intentions even more clear. In a 1917 interview published in *Musical America*, McCormack announced that the rôle of Tristan "might tempt him", but his real ambition was to sing Walther in *Die Meistersinger*. If this recording of the *Prize Song* was McCormack's calling card for a career as a Wagnerian tenor, it was fortunate for him that no opera house picked it up: his voice, even in these years of his vocal prime, never had the necessary weight to handle these monumental rôles; he was no Melchior. Here we have the single piece of evidence that documents this intended new direction in his career, a direction that fortunately for him never occurred.

Music of a more suitable nature for the McCormack voice, and a far cry from Wagnerian opera, is included in the present set; appropriately enough, all of this music is taken from the works of Irish and Irish-American composers. The first of these is by the nineteenth-century Irish composer Michael Balfe, whose opera *The Bohemian Girl* enjoyed enormous popularity in his day and beyond. The aria included here, *Then You'll Remember Me*, is an excellent example of that now vanished style of vocalism often called "Victorian singing". McCormack was the master of this florid style; here he brings his flawless Italian *bel canto* technique to Balfe's seamless melody and flowing English text. While the entire composition is clearly Victorian in text and tone, we are struck by the utter modernity of McCormack's interpretation. McCormack's approach to everything he sang was timeless; no matter what music he explores, he always strikes us as a completely modern singer.

Just as amenable to this most Irish of tenors was the work of Irish-born Victor Herbert, represented here by two selections from his 1917 operetta *Eileen*. Singer and composer had encountered each other early in the tenor's American career; McCormack had created the rôle of Paul in Herbert's ill-fated opera *Natoma* in 1911 (McCormack's recording of Paul's *Address*, noteworthy as his only creator record from his career in

opera, is to be found on Naxos 8.110330). By the time *Eileen* was produced, the 58-year-old composer was past his productive prime, but it had always been, in his words, "the dream of my life to write an Irish opera". *Eileen* turned out to be an operetta, and fittingly enough the story line was loosely based on an 1835 novel, *Rory O'More*, written by the composer's own grandfather, Samuel Lover. The plot is pure Irish romantic melodrama, set in the rebellion of 1798, and the music is vintage Herbert, with some of the melodies sounding fresh to this day. Two of those melodies are included here, interpretations made even more valuable by the fact that Herbert himself conducts the orchestra.

The first of these, *Ireland, My Sireland*, is an unabashed appeal to Irish-American nostalgia for the home country, with the words, "Tell me, when shall I again see Ireland?" resonating deeply with Irish immigrants, many of whom indeed would never see their native country again. The second selection is a more intimate lyric, and in McCormack's hands it is a marvel of phrasing and intonation. We note too the twin terms of endearment that Herbert employs to end *Eileen*: "allanah" and "asthore" are Gaelic words that would serve as eloquent reminders to Irish listeners of the culture they had left behind.

One other Irish-American musician represented here occupies a significant place in McCormack's recorded repertoire. This is the composer and singer Chauncey Olcott, whose several shamrock-drenched musical plays enjoyed enormous popularity in the early twentieth century, playing for many years to Irish audiences throughout the United States. Our Olcott selection is *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling from The Isle O'Dreams*. Even today, this song remains the musical theme most often associated with the popular concept of the Gaelic personality; it is also the unofficial anthem of St Patrick's Day everywhere. Here it is given a definitive treatment by McCormack.

The remainder of the present recordings, made between 1916 and 1918, take us through the final years of World War I, that horrendous conflict that would only come to an end in November 1918. Not surprisingly, most of these selections are war-related. Although the United States did not formally enter the conflict until April 1917, war was very much in the air

on both sides of the Atlantic, and many people felt it was only a matter of time before America would join the Allies in Europe. McCormack was one of them and publicly professed that he was hoping for a military commission. When on one occasion he expressed this to President Woodrow Wilson, the chief executive immediately rejected the idea. “No, McCormack”, Wilson said, “you are needed at home to keep the fountains of sentiment flowing”. The many patriotic songs in the present set represent precisely what that president had in mind.

There’s A Long, Long Trail is but one of many home-front songs of those years, and like other ballads of the day is a combination of lyric and melody that evokes the pain of separation mixed with the hope of return. An even more martial reference to the home front and a distant war is *Send Me Away with a Smile* (heard here in two very similar takes), while another song of the period became so immensely popular its title has even entered the language. This is *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, and McCormack’s clarion singing of the Ivor Novello song has the power to stir us even today. So closely was McCormack associated with this record that one might say he “owned” this war song, just as Caruso “owned” George M. Cohan’s *Over There*. It is always memorable when artist, lyric, and melody meet at such historic moments. Not as well remembered today, but in its day just as popular as the Novello song is *God Be With Our Boys Tonight*, noteworthy for the lovely *legato* McCormack brings to the vocal line, and for the quiet, almost introspective quality the tenor infuses into the patriotic text. A lesser singer might well have yielded to temptation and indulged in *fortissimo* bombast; here, as always, McCormack is at the service of text and music, and the results are worthy of our admiration. We experience a similar employment of *legato* in *Calling Me Home to You*. Here, the tenor’s beautiful Italianate approach to melody and lyric imbues the song with a much higher musical value than it really has - a piece of McCormack magic he brought to countless recordings of lesser material.

One moment from the history of the time looms large in the McCormack discography. The 29th March

1917 recording of *The Star Spangled Banner* included here is appropriate among all the other patriotic items, but this version of the American national anthem reports on a special moment in McCormack’s career. This was when he sang it at a New York concert for an audience that included President Wilson. The concert was a musical send-off for Wilson, who sailed for Europe on 4th December, 1918, less than a month after the fighting had ended, headed for the Paris peace conference that everyone believed at the time would mark the end of “the war to end all wars”.

While war-related items naturally dominate these recording sessions, McCormack did find the time to add some ballads of the hour to his recorded output. *Love, Here is My Heart*, *The Rainbow of Love* (with its unusual theme of a failed love relationship), and the stentorian *Tommy Lad* all fall into this category. One of the most revealing examples of McCormack’s success in popular song is *The Sunshine of Your Smile*. Notice the feeling of intimacy he achieves through his warm tone, his masterful phrasing, and the compelling sense of engagement he creates with the listener. This recording demonstrates so many of his virtues as a popular singer, and it is a testament to his classical training, his sensitivity to musical values, and as always, his unique ability with words.

The present set also gives us two musical items that remind us of one of McCormack’s most successful artistic collaborations, the one he enjoyed with the violinist Fritz Kreisler. During the decade from 1914 to 1924, Kreisler and McCormack made a series of memorable recordings (Naxos 8.111315 and 8.111326); here, we experience Kreisler as both composer and accompanist. We listen to Kreisler’s sympathetic violin in the *Raff Serenade* and in the Offenbach music from *Les contes d’Hoffmann*, both recordings being enhanced by the unique tone of his instrument. Kreisler’s adaptation of *Caprice Viennois* becomes the *Cradle Song 1915*, which, when we listen to the words, makes us realise that musicians of the time were led to transform even lullabies into patriotic songs.

Three final items bring us back to the war, even though at first they do not seem directed toward that

effort. The first of these is Fauré's *Crucifix* (heard in two very different takes) which is a hymn that has no historical connection with the war, but when we experience the sombre atmosphere created by the duet, makes us realize how completely it echoes the enormous suffering of the time. Two additional items also echo this suffering while at the same time they provide us with valuable hints of McCormack's ability in an area of his art that he chose not to document during his vocal prime. The first is *The Lord is My Light*, a recording that shows the McCormack tenor at its very best, while the text allows us to reflect on how very much those words were needed by people in that dark time. Had the singer chosen to record this popular adaptation of a biblical text at some other time, we would think of it as just another recording; here, it becomes a piece closely tied to the war and its losses. The second selection in this special category is *Champs paternels* from Mehul's opera *Joseph*. This opera was never in McCormack's repertoire, but concert programmes of the period make it clear that the singer chose to perform it, and record it, as a supportive gesture for the French forces that were suffering greatly at the time. The French had been sustaining heavy losses in battle since 1915; the following year, in the Battle of Verdun alone, they lost nearly 400,000 soldiers. This record, made in 1917, pays tribute to that suffering. These two recordings also bring us as close as we may come to documentation of McCormack's vaunted ability as a singer of oratorio. During his vocal prime, he never recorded items that would prove beyond any doubt that he was a foremost oratorio singer of his day, but *The Lord Is My Light* reveals very clearly his oratorio style, as does the aria from *Joseph*, with its revelation of that same style.

John Scarry

A Note on the Song Texts

Most of the songs in the present set are sung in English, and, thanks to McCormack's legendary diction, every word is clear and distinct. A few words, however, require some explanation. Two of these words are from Irish Gaelic, and they occur in the Victor Herbert song *Eileen*. "*Asthore*" is Gaelic for "dear" or "beloved", while "*allanah*" comes from that same language's "*a leanbh*" a term of intimate endearment used when one would address a child.

An additional song contains an antique usage of a common English word. This is the use of "save" in *God Be With Our Boys Tonight*. In the phrase, "save that we love you so", the meaning of "save" should be understood as "except". This same song also reveals McCormack to be an artist unafraid to achieve an important effect by making changes of his own to an established lyric. The original sheet music of this World War I ballad contains the following words: "Only I know that time will bring our dear ones back again". McCormack transformed this line into the following words that we hear in the present recording: "Only I pray that God will bring our dear ones back again". In making this small but significant change, the singer was confirming the belief many people have in a time of war: there are indeed no atheists in foxholes.

John Scarry

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.

8.11.2018



8.11.2018

ADD

John McCormack

The McCormack Edition, Vol. 7

Acoustic Recordings (1916-18)

 Playing
Time
79:52

NAXOS Historical

McCORMACK EDITION • 7: Acoustic Recordings (1916-18)

8.11.2018

| | | |
|----|--|------|
| 1 | MATTEI: Non è ver | 3:55 |
| 2 | RAFF: Serenade* | 2:32 |
| 3 | OFFENBACH: Les contes d'Hoffmann: Barcarolle* | 2:33 |
| 4 | WAGNER: Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg: Morning Was Gleaming | 3:57 |
| 5 | KREISLER: Cradle Song 1915 | 3:16 |
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| 10 | BALL: The Isle of Dreams: When Irish Eyes are Smiling | 3:10 |
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| 12 | KEY: The Star-Spangled Banner*** | 2:49 |
| 13 | HERBERT: Eileen: Ireland, My Sireland‡ | 2:43 |
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| 25 | SANDERSON: God Be With Our Boys Tonight | 3:27 |
| 26 | DOREL: Calling Me Home to You | 2:26 |

This seventh volume in the Naxos McCormack edition includes the great tenor's only published recording of the *Preislied* from Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*, sung here in English translation as *Morning Was Gleaming*; music by Irish and Irish-American composers; patriotic war-related songs that evoke the pain of separation and the hope of return, including Ivor Novello's hugely popular *Keep the Home Fires Burning*; and *Champs paternels* from Méhul's opera *Joseph*, recorded as a supportive gesture for the French forces that were suffering greatly at the time. All these works are delivered with an intimacy of feeling, masterful phrasing and a compelling sense of engagement with the listener that were the hallmark of McCormack's approach to everything that he sang.

with Fritz Kreisler, violin*
with Reinald Werrenrath, baritone**
with Harry Macdonough and Lambert Murphy, tenors;
Reinald Werrenrath, baritone; William F. Hooley, bass***
with Dominic Melillo, harp‡
with Rosario Bourdon, celeste‡‡

MADE IN
GERMANY

Producer and Audio Restoration: Ward Marston
Special thanks to John R. Bolig, Lawrence F. Holdridge, Jeffrey Miller and Paul Worth

A complete track list can be found on pages 2 and 3 of the booklet
Cover photo: John McCormack, 1917 (The John Scarry Collection)

www.naxos.com



McCORMACK EDITION • 7: Acoustic Recordings (1916-18)

NAXOS Historical

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