

had the opera in her repertoire but does not mention it in her recollections of the various rarities. The recording, too, was a one-off, coupled on the original 78 disc with Tancredi Pasero singing Mephistopheles' serenade from Gounod's *Faust*.

Another one-off is the 'Ave Maria' from *Otello* — she never sang the role of Desdemona on stage. It seems odd that there should be this and yet nothing on records of her Violetta, which was her major role in Verdi. The absence of her Massenet Manon is still more regrettable. But there it is: we are used to 'learning' our singers (pre-LP, that is) from what in total amounts to a very short span of listening-time.

The wonder is that they come across to us so vividly, the individuality so distinct. Those who know Favero simply from her duet with Tito Schipa probably know a great deal about her after all — think of those lovely, many-coloured inflections and the thrill of that unmistakably old-fashioned Italian vibrancy. With this present collection they will certainly be able to learn more — and perhaps some of them will share with the writer a certain perverse satisfaction in the thought that there was in fact more to our singer than our own ears will ever tell us. It leaves something to the imagination.

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Nimbus Records

MAFALDA FAVERO



PRIMA VOCE

MAFALDA FAVERO 1903-1981

[1]	TURANDOT , Puccini - Signore, ascolta Rec: 1937	Matrix: OBA 1450-1	HMV	Cat: DA 1498	2.30
[2]	TURANDOT , Puccini - Tu che di gel Rec: c 1929/30	Matrix: B-2190	Columbia	Cat: D 5932	2.52
[3]	MANON LESCAUT , Puccini - In quelle trine Rec: 1937	Matrix: OBA 1825-3	HMV	Cat: DA 1563	2.21
[4]	LODOLETTA , Mascagni - Flammen perdonami Rec: 1941	Matrix: 2BA 5091	HMV	Cat: DB 5397	4.11
[5]	L'AMICO FRITZ , Mascagni - Son pochi fiori Rec: 1937	Matrix: OBA 1451-2	HMV	Cat: DA 1498	3.25
[6]	L'AMICO FRITZ , Mascagni - Suzel, buon di Rec: 1937 with Tito Schipa, tenor	Matrix: 2BA 1700-2/1-2	HMV	Cat: DB 3067	9.29
[7]	L'AMICO FRITZ , Mascagni - Non mi resta Rec: c 1929/30	Matrix: B-2651	Columbia	Cat: D 6086	2.13
[8]	OTELLO , Verdi - Ave Maria Rec: 1941	Matrix: 2BA 5092-1	HMV	Cat: DB 5397	5.00
[9]	L'OMBRA , Bottacchiari - O tu ch'el sai Rec: 19 December 1946 Ines Ruotolo, harp	Matrix: OBA 6168	HMV	Cat: DA 11301	3.09
[10]	DON GIOVANNI , Mozart - Vedrai carino Rec: 1941	Matrix: 2BA 5103-2	HMV	Cat: DB 5446	3.46
[11]	MADAMA BUTTERFLY , Puccini - Ancora un passo orvia Rec: c 1929/30	Matrix: B-3627	Columbia	Cat: DQ 1070	2.45

and very new Renata Tebaldi to lead the Quartet in the prayer from *Mosè in Egitto*, the other the still reigning lyric soprano and link with Toscanini's time at the theatre sixteen years earlier, Mafalda Favero. Act 3 of *Manon Lescaut* was given to represent Puccini: perhaps a strange choice but it had been recently in the repertory and that Act is a good one for involving the company as a whole. Favero's Manon was normally Massenet's, but she had sung the Puccini version at the latest revival in 1944, and, as we hear from the recording made of Toscanini's return, she sang her sad phrases from the heart and with instantly identifiable quality of tone. There must have been several who coveted the opportunity; nobody could have reasonably begrudged it her.

The single recording from *Manon Lescaut* included in this present recital will surely strike many listeners as coming very close to the ideal. Some record collectors will recall versions of the aria by sopranos of slightly earlier times, Maria Farneti and the Argentinian Hina Spani. Favero is in that tradition, where the singing-line is kept firm and even while responding to an emotional sensitivity which finds expression in lights and shades, with delicacy and restraint reinforcing the passion and abandonment at the heart of all such music. It is there too in the aria from *Lodoletta*. Favero's stage-personality was marked by a boldness and a kind of sophistication which I have been told by an admirer who heard her many times did not quite suit the shy, simple-hearted girl of Mascagni's opera, yet the recording is exquisite. In *Le grandi voci*, the critic Rodolfo Celletti makes a distinction — the expected one, no doubt — between the early recordings on Columbia and the later on Voce del padrone: in the first he finds the voice fresher, the art less mature, whereas the later discs are the more fully 'achieved'. Perhaps he is right, yet I couldn't swear to it myself: the *Lohengrin* solos on Columbia, for instance, are surely the work of an already expressive and imaginative artist, fully in control of her resources. At the other end, the prayer from *L'Ombra*, the latest of the recordings, made in 1946, finds the voice only very slightly aged. It's a strange record, incidentally. The opera by Ugo Bottacchiari, telling of a girl who dies abroad and returns to her lover as an unembraceable shadow, is said to have had considerable success in its time (premiere 1899) but a search for early recordings has not yielded results. Favero

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premiere of Felice Lattuada's *Le preziose ridicole*. Other roles at La Scala in the 1930s included Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*), Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Norina (*Don Pasquale*), Micaëla (*Carmen*), Marta, Louise, Margherita (*Mefistofele*), Elsa (*Lohengrin*), Nannetta (*Falstaff*), Suzel (*L'amico Fritz*). Her ready musicianship meant that she was often called on for premieres and novelties, such as Rabaud's *Marouf* and Wolf-Ferrari's *Donna Boba*. The warmest receptions of all greeted her Manon (Massenet) and Mimì, roles which stayed with her throughout her career.

It was in the second decade of her time at La Scala that she added some heavier roles to her repertoire, notably Mascagni's *Iris* (which she considered the heaviest) and Puccini's *Butterfly*. Callas dubbed that 'a killer', and Favero herself in retrospect concluded that it probably shortened her career by at least five years. For Favero, the exhaustion experienced after performing *Butterfly* was emotional as well as vocal: she says (Rasponi *op cit*) "I was literally undone, and it took me a couple of days to regain my composure and strength". The biographer, Buscaglia, writes that "she entered *Butterfly*'s personality down to the last psychological detail, reconstructing the life, intimately reliving the love and the tragedy". Her voice, moreover, caught the whole range of feeling, from the joyous intoxication of love to the final agony of soul. It was, he says, a role which more than ever before revealed the singer's mature art. He does not say anything about the cost, but she herself was clear enough.

She was still singing *Butterfly*, *Mimì* and *Manon* at La Scala in 1947. The next year brought a return as *Adriana Lecouvreur*, and 1949 saw her there for the last time, in two unexpected roles, *Giulietta* in *Les contes d'Hoffmann* and the *Woman* in the premiere of *Milhaud's Le pauvre Matelot* (which she didn't like and which can hardly have been an opera of choice for her farewell). A high-point, as far as honour and occasion were concerned, came a little earlier. It was the great evening of May 11, 1946, when the theatre, restored as a prime task in post-war reconstruction, opened for the first time since the bombing of August 1943, and welcomed, as the symbol of its glorious past and its regeneration to come, the 79 year-old Arturo Toscanini. He conducted a programme of Italian music from Rossini to Boito. Two soprano soloists were chosen, one the young

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12	MADAMA BUTTERFLY , Puccini - <i>Bimba dagli occhi pieni di ma lia</i> Rec: 1936 Matrix: 2BA 1381-1/2-1 HMV Cat: DB 2894 with Alessandro Ziliani, tenor	9.05
13	LA BOHÈME , Puccini - <i>Si, mi chiamano Mimì...O soave fanciulla</i> Rec: 1937 Matrix: 2BA 1826-1/561-3 HMV Cat: DB 3200/2521 with Alessandro Ziliani, tenor	8.37
14	LA BOHÈME , Puccini - <i>Donde lieta usci</i> Rec: c 1929/30 Matrix: B-3625 Columbia Cat: DQ 1071	2.54
15	LA BOHÈME , Puccini - <i>Sono andati?</i> Rec: c 1929/30 Matrix: B-3622 Columbia Cat: DQ 1021	2.49
16	PAGLIACCI , Leoncavallo - <i>Stridono lassù</i> Rec: c 1929/30 Matrix: B-2451 Columbia Cat: D 6123	2.21
17	LOHENGRIN , Wagner - <i>Sola nei miei</i> Rec: c 1929/30 Matrix: B-2459 Columbia Cat: 4154X	3.17
18	LOHENGRIN , Wagner - <i>Aurette a cui</i> Rec: c 1929/30 Matrix: B-2449-2 Columbia Cat: 4154X	3.19
19	MARTA , Flotow - <i>Te sola, vergin rosa</i> Rec: c 1929/30 Matrix: B-3618 Columbia Cat: DQ 1070	3.00

Total playing time

77.00

Tracks 1, 3, 5, 6, 12, 13(b) : Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala, Giuseppe Antonicelli, conductor.

Track 13(a) : Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala, Franco Ghione, conductor.

Tracks 4, 8, 10 orchestra conducted by A. Sabino.

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MAFALDA FAVERO

To a whole generation of record collectors outside Italy Mafalda Favero was Tito Schipa's partner in the Cherry Duet from *L'amico Fritz*. She was, we all agreed, a very worthy partner, and we probably went as far as looking her up in the books, which placed her firmly in Milan (1928-1950) with plentiful appearances throughout Italy and excursions abroad, including South America, London (1937 and '39), San Francisco and (1938-9) the Metropolitan, New York. Perhaps we made a mental note of her part as Margherita in the first complete recording of Boito's *Mefistofele*. And just possibly we cast around for imports on Voce del padrone, or Italian HMV, when their Special List became for a time excitingly available. But she was certainly not the well-known figure she should have been.

The reason, of course, is the Second World War. Favero was born in 1903 (earlier reference books give later dates), so that she had arrived at her mid-30s at the outbreak of war, which cut across her career just when it was beginning to fulfil its international promise. Like other Italian singers, she was prevented from leaving for the Metropolitan in 1940, and when the war was over so were her best days as a singer. She continued to appear in opera, though with decreasing frequency, till 1961, when she bade farewell as Mimì at Reggio Emilia opposite a debutant Rodolfo called Luciano Pavarotti. As a lyric soprano, her roles were the roles of youth, and by 1950 the operatic world and the record companies had found new heroines. Just occasionally it happens that a soprano from one age renews her career in the next age but one; however, Mafalda Favero was not Magda Olivero.

Yet hers remains a very distinguished career, and the recordings confirm to a later generation that she was indeed a very special singer. One of the older sopranos she most loved and admired was Claudia Muzio (by comparison with whom Callas seemed to her impressive but unmoving), and it was part of her aim and achievement to infuse her own lighter voice with something of that singer's warmth and emotional strength. The quick vibrato which constituted part of its timbre was also a characteristic feature of

Italian singing at that time, part of the authentic thrill of an operatic voice. Favero was unusual in combining it, and a sturdy chest voice, with the delicacy and grace of a light soprano: she had not a great deal of volume at command (the records may suggest a bigger voice than it actually was), but by arts of contrast and projection she made of it a fully effective instrument in a large theatre. And, perhaps above all, there was a personal quality: what most strongly impressed those who came to know her art over the years was the animation, the aliveness, of all she did. Everything seemed newly felt; nothing was routine.

Favero was born in Portomaggiore, a village near Ferrara. Her biographer (Italo Buscaglia: *Mafalda Favero nella vita e nell'arte*, 1946) tells of a solitary childhood and youth, preoccupied with unrealized yearnings which began to take form when she discovered the Conservatorio at Bologna. Reluctant parents were persuaded to let her study singing, and, with her small voice, innate musicality and exceptional memory, she was reckoned to be good for a modest career as a recitalist. The call to opera nevertheless came early, with a debut in Cremona, under a pseudonym, as Lola in *Cavalleria rusticana*. The real start dates from a year later, with Liù in *Turandot*, sung to the notoriously critical audience in Parma: "I was thrown to the wolves" she told Lanfranco Rasponi (*The Last Prima Donnas*, 1984), adding "but sometimes fortune smiles on the fearless". Concert work continued, fortunately for her as it was through her singing in a Mascagni programme given in Milan that she came to the notice of authorities from La Scala. At her audition she then impressed the authority who mattered most, and was offered the part of Eva in *Die Meistersinger* (or *I maestri cantori*, as it was sung in Italian) by Toscanini himself. This happened in 1928 and marked the beginning of a twenty-two year association with the house which Favero always regarded as her artistic home.

It must have been a remarkable *Meistersinger*. Its Sachs was the veteran French bass Marcel Journet, its Walther Aureliano Pertile, classic exponent of Italian *verismo*. The young Eva won praise especially for her part in the Quintet, and was said, more generally, to have "immediately conquered the public with the purity and security of her singing". She soon proved her versatility with a graceful comic touch in the

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MAFALDA FAVERO 1903-1981

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|---|---|--|
| 1. TURANDOT , Puccini 2.30
Signore, ascolta r. 1937 | 9. L'OMBRA , Bottacchiari 3.09
O tu ch'el sai r. 1946
Ines Ruotolo, harp | 16. PAGLIACCI , Leoncavallo 2.21
Stridono lassù
r. 1929/30 |
| 2. TURANDOT , Puccini 2.52
Tu che di gel r. 1929/30 | 10. DON GIOVANNI 3.46
Mozart - Vedrai carino r. 1941 | 17. LOHENGRIN , Wagner 3.17
Sola nei miei
r. 1929/30 |
| 3. MANON LESCAUT 2.21
Puccini - In quelle trine
r. 1937 | 11. MADAMA BUTTERFLY 2.45
Puccini - Ancora un
passo orvia r. 1929/30 | 18. LOHENGRIN , Wagner 3.19
Aurette a cui r. 1929/30 |
| 4. LODOLETTA 4.11
Mascagni
Flammen perdonami r. 1941 | 12. MADAMA BUTTERFLY 9.05
Puccini - Bimba dagli
occhi pieni di ma lia r. 1936
with Alessandro Ziliani, tenor | 19. MARTA , Flotow 3.00
Te sola, vergin rosa
r. 1929/30 |
| 5. L'AMICO FRITZ 3.25
Mascagni - Son pochi fiori
r. 1937 | 13. LA BOHÈME , Puccini 8.37
Si, mi chiamano Mimì...
O soave fanciulla r. 1937
with Alessandro Ziliani, tenor | Total playing time 77.00 |
| 6. L'AMICO FRITZ 9.29
Mascagni - Suzel, buon di
r. 1937
with Tito Schipa, tenor | 14. LA BOHÈME , Puccini 2.54
Donde lieta uscì r. 1929/30 | Tracks 1, 3, 5, 6, 12, 13(b) :
Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala,
Giuseppe Antonicelli, conductor. |
| 7. L'AMICO FRITZ 2.13
Mascagni - Non mi resta
r. 1929/30 | 15. LA BOHÈME , Puccini 2.49
Sono andati? r. 1929/30 | Track 13(a) :
Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala,
Franco Ghione, conductor. |
| 8. OTELLO , Verdi 5.00
Ave Maria r. 1941 | | Tracks 4, 8, 10 :
orchestra conducted by A. Sabino. |

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