

bibliography contains nearly three pages of sources, referenced frequently in the text. *The British Classical Record Industry, 1945–1959* is recommended to anyone interested in this subject. Reviewed by Gary A. Galo

**Gigli: Master Tenor.** By Colin Bain, Barry R. Ashpole, General Editor and Publisher. 560pp. ISBN: 978-1-7774390-1-9

This is the first comprehensive biography of Beniamino Gigli (1890–1957). Its author, Colin Bain (1926–2007), undertook prodigious research that resulted in a massively detailed and documented account of its subject's life and career. At Bain's death, his work was left unfinished and completed by Barry Ashpole, who lacked access to Bain's voluminous research notes, source citations and interviews, all of which were in the hands of his wife, whose subsequent illness and death kept them unavailable to Ashpole. Today, he says, their whereabouts are unknown. Nevertheless, he felt obligated to publish Bain's biography without them despite the inevitable clouding of its reputation as a work of scholarship.

Bain's chronicle is the work of an unabashed admirer of his subject. Gigli's standing as one of the greatest singers in history, "the possessor of what may have been the most beautiful tenor voice ever heard" and "the greatest of all the post-Caruso tenors" is unassailable in Bain's view. He roundly denounces critics who have found fault with Gigli's tendency toward lachrymose expression and his frequent use of aspirates as stylistic deficiencies. I do not claim a comprehensive knowledge of Gigli's recordings, which range from 1918 through 1956. However, Gary Galo, a friend and colleague who is a vocal connoisseur and also a contributor to this publication, shared his estimate of those faults, as well as a short list of Gigli's best recordings: "I think the prime recordings are the Victors made in the 1920s, before the bad habits start creeping in, [viz.] crooning and otherwise singing off his breath, and singing his passaggio way too open as he tackled repertoire that was too heavy for him, in an attempt to sound 'louder.' His passaggio was impeccable in the 1920s. He had learned how to use his registers as well as any tenor on record, but he sometimes lost his way later on". The 1946 *Aida* is especially problematic in that regard. "He does a lot of what I consider yelling in the passaggio in an attempt to make his voice sound louder than it really was".

"If I could take a couple of Gigli 'singles' to the desert island, surely the 1922 Victor Improvviso from *Andrea Chénier* would be one of them. It's far better than the version in his complete recording, though that one is still very good. The *Tosca* and *Manon Lescaut* arias from Oct. 27, 1926, are also desert island sides, as is the 1929 "Cielo e mar" from *La Gioconda*. Of the complete opera recordings, those that were a regular part of his repertoire are the most valuable, which means all but *Aida*".

Whether familiar or unfamiliar with Gigli's vocal artistry, listening to his recordings is essential to an understanding of that artistry. But those who seek details of Gigli's life and career will find it comprehensively chronicled. Bain is an uncritical admirer, so it is not surprising that his story reads like "A Fan's Notes." From his provincial debut in Rovigo in October 1914 (as Enzo in Ponchielli's *La Gioconda*), Gigli seemed to move from triumph to triumph, told in a "and then he sang..." manner that is often quite breathless and moves the reader along expeditiously, although many will encounter triumph fatigue after a while and require a pause. Nevertheless, it's a good story and keeps up interest throughout its 24 chapters.

For a book on singing and opera, I was surprised to encounter a larger number of typos and spelling errors than I would have expected. Many of them are insignificant, but others suggest a proofreader with little or no musical or general cultural knowledge. My favorite is on p. 395, where the Zeppelin that burned and crashed when landing in Lakehurst, New Jersey in 1937 is “Hindussburg” rather than *Hindenburg*. Later, two familiar names are misspelt: Darryl Zanuck and Sigmund Romberg. While embarrassing, such lapses do not seriously detract from the book’s usefulness.

There is no discography in the book, but John Bolig’s definitive discography of the HMV and Victor recordings can be downloaded free from Mainspring Press ([www.mainspringpress.com](http://www.mainspringpress.com)). There are several large-scale CD collections from both Naxos and Testament that embrace almost all of Gigli’s recordings. An accompanying web site offers additional material (<https://bit.ly/2MwvznB>) and should be consulted periodically for additions. The book is one of those paperbacks that is too thick for its dimensions, which, combined with the “perfect” binding, makes it clumsy to hold. After finishing it, those who wish to explore the topic further should seek out Gigli’s own memoirs, available in English translation, either from a library or the e-bay aftermarket. *Reviewed by Dennis D. Rooney*

***Poulenc: The Life in the Songs.*** By Graham Johnson, with translations of song texts by Jeremy Sams. NY: Liveright, 2020. 554pp (hardcover). Illustrations, Bibliography, Index of Song Titles, Index of Names. ISBN 978-1-63149-523-6 (hardcover), ISBN 9781631495243 (epub). \$49.95

Graham Johnson, renowned British collaborative pianist and scholar of art song, continues an impressive pace of publishing major works on renowned song composers. His previous magnum opus in 3 volumes, *Franz Schubert: The Complete Songs*, paralleled his feat of being the first pianist to record all of the more than 700 lieder for Hyperion. Three years later, Gabriel Fauré’s *mélodies* and their poets were in focus. Now Johnson reveals new vistas on Francis Poulenc’s personal life as the background for his challenging and enchanting *mélodies*. New English translations are provided by Jeremy Sams, son of German lied specialist Eric Sams. Performers have had a detailed guide to these songs since the late 1970s, thanks to Poulenc’s recital partner, baritone Pierre Bernac, for whom about two thirds of the songs were written. Johnson’s investigation into Poulenc’s personal connections with the poets, performers, patrons, family, and lovers provides an enriched terrain from which we now can more completely fathom the emotive effect we feel in listening to and performing these masterworks. Bernac embodied this legacy through a reverence for textual precision and adherence to every detail in the scores, modeling for two generations the technical means by which Poulenc’s aura of deep emotion can be evoked by outward restraint. Johnson builds on this rigor by furnishing the interpersonal web upon which these works were spun.

Following a formula polished in previous publications, and based on decades of concert program notes, liner notes for recordings, lectures, and master classes, Johnson delves into the lives and circumstances surrounding the creation of the poetry and traces the way it came into the composer’s hands. His antennae then pick up the smallest tremors of inspiration and follow them as Poulenc careens around France (a helpful map shows about a dozen frequent destinations), encountering people who fuel his insatiable sexual appetite as well as his intellectual brilliance and religious fervor. Whirlwinds of social activity are