

When we move abruptly to the 1931 and 1932 electrics, the transition is arresting, for we enter a domain of supremely assured singing at which Gigli had not quite arrived in 1919. Now the voice is stronger, the tone is more lavishly bestowed, and the communication is complete. The two songs in English, one by Tosti and one by Sullivan, are all voice and little else, salutes by Gigli to his English speaking admirers. But in the other recordings, in arias from *Manon*, *Faust*, *The Pearl Fishers*, and *La Bohème*, the last surely the recording that won him more admirers than any other, Gigli has become a unique tenor phenomenon who is able to do anything he likes with his voice, within the extensive lyric and *spinto* repertory of his choosing. The frequent transitions from *piano* to *forte* and back become something to wonder at. The *Faust* and *Bohème* arias are crowned now with two prodigious top Cs, and in *The Pearl Fishers* aria Gigli, like the legendary Angelo Masini, achieves the distinction of singing an entire aria in *mezza voce*, including a cadenza rising to a high B natural.

The Milan electrics continue this pattern. "Cujus animam" is sung with breathtaking élan, with a modified cadenza intended to avoid the falsetto high D-flat Rossini had written (all falsetto singing then being deeply out of favor in Italy, as Lauri Volpi was to discover painfully when he ventured the role of Arturo in *I Puritani* in Florence the following year). "Pietà Signore" is a reverent but virtuoso memento of that singing of sacred music that had first nurtured Gigli as an artist, while the songs in Italian and Neapolitan, two of them with a certain moving autobiographical significance for Gigli, are sung with an attack and variety as well as an opulence of tone that merge operatic forms of vocalism with what are usually the more muted idioms of drawing room and folk music. Mark Obert-Thorn is to be congratulated on transfers that bring vividly to life the singing of one of the century's greatest tenors. *Reviewed by Colin Bain.*

Endnote

1. Arias and duets from *Mefistofele*, *Tosca*, *La Favorita*, *La Gioconda*, *Lodoletta*, *Iris*, *Faust*, *La Bohème*, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *L'amico Fritz*, *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, *Fedora*, *Manon*, and *Stabat Mater*. Songs by Cannio, Tosti, Sullivan, Schubert, Niedermeyer, and De Curtis.

Giordano: Andrea Chénier. Beniamino Gigli, Maria Caniglia, Maria Huder, Giulietta Simionato, Vittoria Palombini, Gino Bechi, Giuseppe Taddei, Leone Paci, Italo Tajo, Adelio Zagonara, Gino Conti; Chorus and Orchestra of La Scala, Milan, Oliviero de Fabritiis, conductor. Arkadia 78012 (2CDs).

After lapsing for some years from the currently available catalogs, this classic performance is now available on three labels, Grammofono, Phonégraphie, and Arkadia. However, the Arkadia issue is of such superior sound quality, absolutely clear in both the voices and the orchestral detail, with the timbers of the voices and the spirit of the moment faithfully captured as if they had been recorded only yesterday, as to merit special comment and reappraisal.

Gigli's Chénier has long been famous both for the quality of his performance and for the prominent position it occupied in the molding of his career. He first essayed it in Philadelphia on 1 March 1921; he gave the opera its Metropolitan première six nights later;

he used it to open the San Francisco seasons in 1924 and 1938; he gave his London debut in it in 1930; he sang it for his return to the Scala in 1932; and he performed it in an epic season in the Verona Arena in 1934, attracting audiences of more than forty thousand a night without sound amplification. When he came to record it complete in 1941, the best possible cast, including such notable new figures as Giulietta Simionato, Giuseppe Taddei, and Italo Tajo, was assembled together with the Scala orchestra and chorus and, despite his fifty-one years and the approaching decline of his vocal powers, Gigli was sufficiently inspired to give a rousing performance with scarcely so much as a hint of vocal limitation within earshot.

Up to 1921, when Gigli first performed it, the role of Chénier, France's greatest lyric poet of the eighteenth century and a partly inadvertent, partly willful victim of the revolutionary terror of 1794, had been increasingly caught up with the then current fashion of the stentorian style in the tenor voice, which was scarcely compatible with the idealistic and often introspective poetry, not to say the political moderation and aristocratic origins, of its subject, for Chénier was by birth André de Chénier, a member of the noblesse. In this performance, as records and reviews suggest he did from the beginning, Gigli achieves a fluent and compelling fusion of poetic and romantic lyricism with fiery drama and declamation, a considerable vocal feat that reconciles Illica's libretto with Giordano's taxing music. The Improviso becomes an overwhelming statement; the Credo, scarcely less impassioned, is touched with a sense of the mysterious power of which Chénier speaks; the Love Duet is fraught with ardor in the midst of terror; "Come un bel di di maggio" evokes the tender poetry of Chénier's vision; in the final duet the heights are mounted with consummate ease and telling effect.

The other performances are scarcely less impressive down to the most minor role. Caniglia is a Maddalena who is suitably impassioned and vulnerable. Gino Bechi, who is less subtly artistic than Carlo Galeffi in an earlier Columbia complete recording, is nevertheless utterly convincing in the brooding fierceness of his anger, in his flaming fervor, and in his gallant softening toward compassion. As Bersi, Maria Huder matches her colleagues; as Roucher, Tajo is excellent; as the Contessa de Coigny, Giulietta Simionato serves early notice of the distinguished career that was to follow. Over all, Oliviero de Fabritiis presides with that cultivated touch, surging and delicate in turn, that was to mark his performances throughout his career. This is an issue to be highly recommended. *Reviewed by Colin Bain.*

George Gershwin Memorial Concert — Hollywood Bowl, 8 September 1937. North American Classics NAC 4001 (2 CDs).

The one-hundredth anniversary of George Gershwin's birth in 1998 has led to many recordings, concerts, and other tributes. Of particular interest is *George Gershwin Memorial Concert*. Broadcast on a national radio hookup from the Hollywood Bowl on 8 September 1937, this live memorial concert for Gershwin, who died shortly before, is, as advertised, the "must-have" double-disc of the Gershwin centennial. Excerpts from this one-of-a-kind all-star concert have been previously available on LPs and Compact Discs (most notably the 1995 release *Gershwin Memorial Concert, The Radio Years*), but this is the first time a complete version has been available in any commercial format.

George Gershwin Memorial Concert supplies a true sense of occasion for the listener. Luminaries of both the classical and the popular music worlds of the 1930s generally offer