

Luisa Tetrazzini

the
complete
Zonophone
(1904)
and Victor
recordings
(1911~20)



CD I (73:50)

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| 1 | UN BALLO IN MASCHERA: Saper vorreste (Verdi) <i>It.</i>
15 iii 1911; C 10059-1 (Victor 88304) | 2:52 |
| 2 | LA SONNAMBULA: Ah, non credea mirarti (Bellini) <i>It.</i>
16 iii 1911; C. 10064-1 (Victor 88305) | 4:30 |
| 3 | LA TRAVIATA: Ah, fors' è lui... Sempre libera (Verdi) <i>It.</i>
16 iii 1911; C. 10065-1 (Victor 88293) | 4:37 |
| 4 | IL CARNEVALE DI VENEZIA: O me beata!... La bruna gondoletta (Benedict) <i>It.</i>
16 iii 1911; C 10066-1 & C 10067-1 (Victor 88291 & 88292) | 6:37 |
| 5 | LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR: Splendon le sacre faci 'Mad scene' (Donizetti) <i>It.</i>
with Walter Oesterreicher, <i>flautist</i>
16 iii 1911; C 10068-1 (Victor 88299) | 4:48 |
| 6 | The Last Rose of Summer (Moore) <i>Eng.</i>
17 iii 1911; C 10058-2 (Victor 88308) | 4:16 |
| 7 | IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA: Una voce poco fa (Rossini) <i>It.</i>
17 iii 1911; C. 10071-1 (Victor 88301) | 4:11 |
| 8 | LA PÉERLE DU BRÉSIL: Chamant oiseau (David) <i>It.</i>
with Walter Oesterreicher, <i>flautist</i>
17 iii 1911; C 10072-1 (Victor 88318) | 4:59 |
| 9 | MIGNON: Io son Titania 'Polonaise' (Thomas) <i>It.</i>
17 iii 1911; C. 10073-1 (Victor 88296) | 4:29 |
| 10 | LASHIJAS DEL ZEBEDEO: Al pensar en el dueño 'Carceleras' (Chapi) <i>Sp</i>
18 iii 1911; C. 10057-3 (Victor 88294) | 4:18 |

- 11 RIGOLETTO: **Caro nome che il mio cor** (Verdi) *It.* 4:07
18 iii 1911; C 10074-1 (Victor 88295)
- 12 L'eco 'Swiss Echo Song' (Eckert) *It.* 4:40
18 iii 1911; C 10070-2 (Victor 88311)
- 13 LAKMÉ: **Dov' è l'indiana bruna?** 'Bell Song' (Delibes) *It.* 3:58
18 iii 1911; C 10075-1 (Victor 88297)
- 14 LA SONNAMBULA: **Ah, non giunge** (Bellini) *It.* 2:58
with Clement Barone, *flautist*
18 iii 1911; C 10076-1 (Victor 88313)
- 15 **Deh, torno mio bene** 'Air and Variations' (Proch) *It.* 4:19
with Clement Barone, *flautist*
18 iii 1911; C 10077-1 (Victor 88307)
- 16 LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR: **Chi mi frena in tal momento?** (Donizetti) *It.* 4:04
with Enrico Caruso, *tenor*; Josephine Jacoby, *contralto*; Pasquale Amato, *baritone*;
Marcel Journet, *bass*; and Angelo Bada, *tenor*
19 i 1912; C 11446-3 (Victor 96201)
- 17 RIGOLETTO: **Bella figlia dell'amore** (Verdi) *It.* 3:39
with Enrico Caruso, *tenor*; Josephine Jacoby, *contralto*; and Pasquale Amato, *baritone*;
13 ii 1912; C 11447-4 (HMV 2-054038; unpublished on Victor)

CD 2 (76:13)

- 1 The Swallows (Cowan) *Eng.* 3:30
13 ii 1912; C 11589-1 (Victor 88349)
- 2 LAKMÉ: **Dov' è l'indiana bruna?** 'Bell Song' (Delibes) *It.* 3:47
18 ii 1913; C 10075-2 (Victor 88297)

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| 3 | IL TROVATORE: Tacea la notte placida (Verdi) <i>It.</i>
18 ii 1913; C 12918-1 (Victor 88420) | 3:11 |
| 4 | IL TROVATORE: Timor di me...D'amor sull'ali rosee (Verdi) <i>It.</i>
19 ii 1913; C 12928-1 (Victor 88426) | 4:34 |
| 5 | Rhapsody (De Koven) <i>Eng.</i> | 1:54 |
| 6 | Serenata inutile [Ständchen], op. 106 no. I (Brahms) <i>It.</i>
19 ii 1913; C 12929-1 (Victor 88427) | 2:18 |
| 7 | Ah! che assorta in dolce incanto 'Grande Valse' (Venzano) <i>It.</i>
19 ii 1913; C 12930-1 (Victor 88423) | 3:39 |
| 8 | DINORAH: Ombra leggiara 'Shadow Song' (Meyerbeer) <i>It.</i>
19 ii 1913; C 12931-1 (Victor 88298) | 3:58 |
| 9 | ROSALINDA: Meco verrai su quella 'Pastorale' (Veracini) <i>It.</i>
21 ii 1913; C 12917-2 (Victor 88432) | 2:57 |
| 10 | Bonnie Sweet Bessie (Gilbert) <i>Eng.</i>
21 ii 1913; C 12944-1 (Victor 88428) | 3:48 |
| 11 | LA FORZA DEL DESTINO: Pace, pace, mio Dio (Verdi) <i>It.</i>
12 v 1914; C 14821-1 (Victor 88502) | 4:32 |
| 12 | CARMEN: Io dico, no, non son paurosa 'Micaela's Air' (Bizet) <i>It.</i>
12 v 1914; C 14819-2 (Victor 88503) | 4:28 |
| 13 | I VESPRE SICILIANI: Mercè, dilette amiche (Verdi) <i>It.</i>
12 v 1914; C 14822-1 (Victor 88504) | 3:40 |
| 14 | Tre giorni son che Nina (Ciampi; arr. Dulcken) <i>It.</i>
12 v 1914; C 14815-2 (Victor 88505) | 3:48 |
| 15 | LINDA DI CHAMOUNIX: O luce di quest'anima (Donizetti) <i>It.</i>
13 v 1914; C 14817-2 (Victor 88506) | 4:32 |

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| 16 | Canzone de Solvejg [Solvejg's Song] (Grieg) <i>It.</i>
13 v 1914; C 14820-2 (Victor 88508) | 4:04 |
| 17 | IL FLAUTO MAGICO: Gl'angui d'inferno [Der hölle Rache] (Mozart) <i>It.</i>
2 xi 1920; B 24676-1 (unpublished on Victor) | 2:44 |
| 18 | LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR: Splendon le sacre faci 'Mad Scene' (Donizetti) <i>It.</i>
8 ix 1904; 3515 (Zonophone 2500) | 3:25 |
| 19 | IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA: Una voce poco fa (Rossini) <i>It.</i>
8 ix 1904; 3513 (Zonophone 2501) | 2:22 |
| 20 | RIGOLETTO: Caro nome che il mio cor (Verdi) <i>It.</i>
8 ix 1904; 3511 (Zonophone 2502) | 3:26 |
| 21 | ROMEO E GIULIETTA [ROMÉO ET JULIETTE]: Nella calma (Gounod) <i>It.</i>
8 ix 1904; 3508 (Zonophone 2503) | 2:23 |
| 22 | LA SONNAMBULA: Ah, non giunge (Bellini) <i>It.</i>
8 ix 1904; 3516 (Zonophone 2504) | 2:28 |

CD 1: tracks 1 - 17 with the Victor Orchestra conducted by Joseph Pasternack

CD 2: tracks 1 - 16 with the Victor Orchestra conducted by Joseph Pasternack; track 17 with the Victor Orchestra conducted by Walter B. Rogers; tracks 18 - 22 with Cleofonte Campanini, pianist

Producer: Ward Marston

Production Coordinator: Jeffrey Miller

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ROMOPHONE would like to thank Lawrence Holdridge, Peter Lack, La Scala Autographs and the Metropolitan Opera Archives for their kind help in the production of this CD release.

Thanks to Charles Neilson Gattey, whose biography *Luisa Tetrizzini: the Florentine Nightingale* was published by Scholar Press in 1995, we now possess exhaustive documentation on the career of the most famous Italian soprano of this century, who, thanks to her records, is as admired and beloved today as when she burst upon an astonished Covent Garden audience with her sensational Violetta on 2 November 1907. She was then 36, and everyone wondered where she had been until then. Thanks to Mr Gattey, we now know.

'She came like a bolt from the blue and swept the musical world flat' (letter in EMI archives). She was marvelous copy for journalists, and was photographed sitting on alligators and putting ducks in the oven. She and Mascagni between them invented and perfected the art of newspaper *réclame*.

Mary Garden interviewed Tetrizzini in 1908 for *The World*: 'The most important thing one feels on meeting Mme Tetrizzini is her

personality... There is something present when she is near which has a sort of electric force.' We can see this magnetism in a brief surviving newsreel of her, and we can hear it in her delightfully appealing and brilliant records.

She described herself as a 'coloratura soprano' but her voice, originally a contralto (!), seems to have been what the Italians call a *soprano drammatico d'agilità* of unusual range and power, extending from resonant low notes in the chest register to a high E natural which she could take either in a fluty head tone or in a full-voiced 'mixed' tone. Although some American critics, accustomed to the noble tone of Melba, Nordica, Eames and Calvé, complained that her middle



Tetrizzini as Kosina

voice was weak, nasal and infantile, in 1909 she recorded in London two songs by Tosti in their mezzo-soprano keys, showing off a ravishingly beautiful quality in the medium range.

One of the best descriptions of her voice was penned by a rival coloratura, her friend

Frieda Hempel: 'What a thrilling, unforgettable voice! It was so powerful and so free. The tones were round and strong, not even losing their fullness when, after swelling a note, she diminished it in a pianissimo that had real body and quality all the way through.

Her technique was dazzling. Even the most difficult things she seemed to do without trying – her descending scale had to be heard to be believed! Above all, there was something in the way she sang that swept you off your feet – an élan that sent the chills running up and down your spine. Perhaps Tetrizzini never had the perfectly equalized scale of a Melba, but were not her qualities far more important? To me they are,

for of what use is an otherwise perfect voice unless it also has the power to thrill you? Tetrizzini was a natural musician with a remarkable gift for improvising cadenzas which always sounded right, even though she might do them differently each time. And big though she was, there was a marvelous

daintiness in her vocal style.' (extract from an article in the June 1940 issue of *The American Music Lover*).

In 1904 Tetrizzini made some primitive records, almost by accident, for Zonophone, Victor's 'cheap' label, in New York, but her

recording career proper began in London soon after her Covent Garden début. Negotiations were initially painful, for the diva, feeling herself slighted by the Milan branch, dictated what seemed impossible terms. Victor, the parent company in New York, refused at first to share the burden of her large advance royalty payments, but after her spectacular début at the Manhattan Opera House on 15 January 1908 they

became much more anxious to record her. Tetrizzini was so suspicious of them that Victor had to wait until December 1910 before she finally signed a contract to record fifteen selections before the end of 1911; she accepted an advance of thirty thousand dollars for royalties, and agreed that as from 1 April



Tetrizzini as Lakmé

1911 she would accept a royalty payment of fifty cents on each record sold, instead of the sixty cents that she had managed from the London branch. On 2 November 1920, during her triumphant post-war tour of America, she made three records that she regarded as particularly successful; to her chagrin Victor refused to publish them. Listening today to her wonderful performance (a semitone down) of the Queen of the Night's second aria, which has survived in an isolated sample copy, a striking example of her unique combination of musical precision and high-powered dramatic thrust, I suspect that Victor's new best-seller Galli-Curci may well have intimated that she did not wish to see new Tetrizzini records appearing on the market.

Engineers have always had trouble recording big voices, from Melba's to Sutherland's, and Victor's technicians never seemed to catch the full beauty and bloom of Tetrizzini's voice: the tone is sometimes shrill

and tinny, a common fault in Victor records of the period (Melba's 1910 records are a travesty of her uniquely radiant tone, and even some of Caruso's suffer from metallic distortion). The record collector George Clayton, who heard Tetrizzini sing several

times, assured me that when she sang *L'Edo* she revelled in the fun of the thing, cupping her hands to her mouth to do the echo effects.

Tetrizzini would sometimes turn up for a recording session in less than her best voice; it would be morning and she would not have 'warmed up'. This is true, for example, of *The last rose of summer* which she recorded on 15 March 1911 after having sung a concert in Philadelphia the night

before: she chooses the unusually high key of G and is painfully flat, though otherwise the record is a masterly lesson in drawing a long legato line, the *arcata* of the greatest violinists.

Her phrasing is usually interesting and highly personal, as, for example, in *Ardon gl'incensi*, sung with considerable intensity and a



Caruso's caricature of Tetrizzini

creative use of rubato. Her immortal and possibly unrivalled *Una voce poco fa* is sung in the original key of E, though with many a flight into the stratosphere. Some of the ornaments are Rossini's own, which had passed into common use through Patti, but all of them are beautiful and stylistically appropriate. This Rosina is obviously a big girl with lots of experience, inviting us to smile with her. Here, as in the opening bars of *Ah, non giunge*, we hear some pinched and over-open vowel sounds in the lower medium range, but then she will sing the same notes perfectly later on. She sang this way because Italian light sopranos in her day were expected to cultivate a 'white', open sound to suggest youth ('baby-talk', in Henderson's immortal phrase), just as light tenors often sang with open vowels and a 'bleating' vibrato: these fashions are now extinct.

Caro nome was perhaps the aria she sang most frequently throughout her career: her

interpretation is broadly dramatic, full of fire and dazzling ornamentation (again, largely Patti's and therefore approved by Verdi); she makes the literal, *Urtext* versions of today seem dull indeed. Particularly treasurable is the 'Bell Song' from *Lakmé*, better in 1911 than in



Tetrazzini as 'La fille du regiment'

1913; in pieces like this, and *Il Carnevale di Venezia*, in which a dreamy opening section gives way to an exciting burst of dramatic coloratura, Tetrazzini's vivid musical imagination and infinite vocal resources leave her rivals far behind. Sometimes she cracks on a high note or misses a staccato, but she never allows these little accidents to disturb her sunny complacency. It is noteworthy that in all but

three of the sixteen records she made in March 1911 one single take was enough to produce a satisfactory record for publication.

In his obituary notice in the *New York World-Telegram* on 4 May 1940, Pitts Sanborn said that 'people who hear only a microscopic voice in the rôles of Lucia and Gilda can have

no just idea of how the Lucia Sextet and the Rigoletto Quartet ought to sound. Tetrazzini's soprano dominated those numbers with a grand line as of Greek sculpture.' This we can hear in the *Rigoletto* record with Caruso, Jacoby and Amato, whereas in the *Lucia* Sextet, although the 'grand line' is there, she has been placed too far away to 'dominate' the recording.

Ivor Newton, who often accompanied Tetrazzini at the piano, loved her aria from Veracini's *Rosalinda*, and used it in a radio programme to demonstrate her perfect trill. It is one of her best and most typical records. I cannot quite decide whether the arias from *Il Trovatore* are successful or not, though after an excruciating high A flat at the end of *Tacea la notte* she certainly delivers a spectacular *Di tale amor*. The *Grande Valse* by Venzano was especially written for sopranos to interpolate into the 'Lesson Scene' in *Il Barbiere*, but few can have sung it with the overwhelming brio and panache of

Tetrazzini. What a pity that she did not record the opening Andante. She makes a lovely thing out of De Koven's 'Rhapsody' (in which 'season of love' are the only intelligible words), but we are waiting impatiently to hear her coy and winsome performance of a Brahms

song, of all things, which she sings in the excellent Italian version by the Sicilian composer Pietro Florida. The interpolated high note will not be to everyone's taste.

Her 1914 records include a flawless example of legato singing in *Tre giorni son che Nina*, which also shows the 'tears in the voice' for which she was famous; *Pace, pace, mio Dio* is another moving interpretation, and the 'Siciliana' from *I Vespri*

siciliani is a more polished performance than the rather sketchy version she recorded in London four years earlier. For some reason 'Solvejg's Song', which she sang ravishly in 1910, is one of her poorest offerings, but she is back on top form in *O luce di quest'anima*, although she seems to forget to sing the



Tetrazzini as Mignon



The rivalry between Tetrazzini and Melba as depicted in a 'Punch' cartoon

ornaments in the last repeat.

We are lucky that these records exist. They demonstrate the correct way to sing florid music, each note perfectly articulated yet all supported in a firm legato line; this is what Garcia meant when describing (in *Hints on Singing*, 1894): 'The legato, in which notes should flow distinctly and evenly, "perlées", i.e. smoothly, without either gliding or aspiration' – and also: 'In singing arpeggios the voice must pass with precision and firmness from one sound to another, neither aspirating, detaching, nor slurring, but executing the sounds as in playing the organ.'

Tetrazzini's singing is always alive, and

critics generally praised her for knowing how to act with her voice; still, I like the pen portrait of her by the great critic H. T. Parker of the *Boston Transcript*, who after praising her 'gentle and touching intensity of feeling' and 'lyric singing at its fullest and finest' concludes: 'Her attempts at facial play are not illuminating, except when, at the end of an act, she beams her delight upon the applauding audience. Her gesture is most significant when she wiggles her head and waves her chubby arm at the rejoicing house...'

Now we can all rejoice in the art of the lovable 'Florentine Nightingale' as heard in her complete Victor recordings.

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Luisa Tetrazzini

Luisa Tetrazzini (1871-1940), perhaps the greatest coloratura soprano of the century, made her operatic debut in 1890. She travelled with various opera companies throughout South America before making her US debut in San Francisco in 1905. Her London debut in Covent Garden came two years later, and in 1908 she became a member of the Manhattan Opera. Nicknamed the 'Florentine Nightingale', Tetrazzini was idolised by the public and fêted by royalty; a number of culinary dishes were even named after her. Her interpretations project a sparkling joy and vitality which are vividly captured on her records. This 2-CD set contains Tetrazzini's complete Victor recordings which were made during her glorious years in New York. Virtually all the great coloratura arias from *Lakme*, *Dinorah*, *Mignon* and *Sonnambula* are included, as well as her five rare Zonophone recordings from 1904.

Total timing: 2 hrs 30 mins

Transfers and audio restoration by Ward Marston

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