

THE G&T GAZETTE

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Opera
at Home

SCRATCHY RECORD GROUP

established 1958

MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY - February 1997

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COVER ILLUSTRATIONS

FRONT The cover of the first English edition of *Opera at Home*, which was first produced in a popular edition in 1920, has a sepia image of a gentleman in evening dress seated in style listening to his gramophone. This has been admired by a number of collectors over the years, who have admitted they envy the atmosphere it conveys of cigars, brandy, a leather chair and a warm fire. Michael Woolf has often remarked to me that this is how he would like to listen to his old recordings! **REAR** The Comedy Harmonists, to give them their English name, toured Australia and New Zealand in 1937/8. It is thought that this publicity photograph was made in the Sydney Studios of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. A print from this session was finally published in a book called *Australian Photography* 1947. Its publication could have been delayed by several years because of anti-German feelings with the outbreak of war in 1939.

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Bill Main at 93 Burma Road.

We are grateful to JOHN GRAY for this chance to reprint a small part of the reminiscences of the *Comte de Brioche*, a Frenchman who must surely rate as one of record collecting's unsung heroes. The section we have chosen from his memoirs features the soprano GIUSEPPINA BARUCCI. When this first appeared, a number of distinguished Opera lovers and Record Collectors wrote to the *Comte* pointing out certain inaccuracies in his account of her life and times. Unfortunately, we only have space for one of these replies from Colin Shreve. Ed.

GIUSEPPINA BARUCCI

by

PURVIS DE BRIOCHE

EARLY in life I realised that I had the mission to collect every precious relic bequeathed to us by the vocal giants of the Golden Age of Opera. I therefore dedicated myself to the formation of the Musée de Disques at Brioche, which I think can truly be described as the Louvre of vocal art. If I have been reluctant to allow copies to be made of any of my treasures, this is because I believe that not the slightest risk should be taken that might involve damage, and also because I hold that only an original copy can reproduce the true timbre of a voice. I have often regretted that my refusal to co-operate with the record companies was necessary, for no other copies exist of my rarest treasures, the undoubted cause of so many once-famous names now being forgotten.

One such case is the legendary soprano Giuseppina Barucci who bore the title *La Divina*. Although it is stated in all the reference books that she was discovered in the slums of Naples by Boito, who presented her to Verdi, she was in fact born in 1840 of well-to-do Florentine parents, as her distinction of bearing well testified. The incorrect account was a fabrication of Boito and Verdi's wife, who conspired together to win the old man's sympathy for the young Barucci and to woo him away from Anastasi Pozzoni, his favourite Violetta until Barucci made the role her own. In later life her person included to *embonpoint*, but this scarcely affected the fragility of her interpretation. How imperious yet demure she was in Act 1! What a chaste sophistication in her every movement and inflection! If I had to choose only one from her many recordings, which span 30 years of her long career, it would be her Berliner cylinder of *Addio del passato*, so wound in its deathly pathos and *morbidezza*. The control is amazing, the *legato* miraculously smooth, with the heart-rending sobs superbly timed

so as not to disrupt the line. The reading of Germont's letter at the beginning is an unrivalled example of dramatic declamation in the true grand manner. Alas, there is no soprano today who can begin to be mentioned in the same breath as this mighty diva.

I WAS GREATLY INTERESTED to read the fascinating article by the *Comte de Brioché*. Collectors may like to hear an interesting anecdote connected with that great cantatrice Giuseppina Barucci of whom (quite rightly) the *Comte* writes so glowingly. Barucci was one of the few great singers to record for the little-known *Système Tosch*. Adelbert Tosch had invented an extremely original recording system at the time when La Barucci was at the height of her powers. Tosch recorded on 13-inch square plates. The actual invention was a closely-guarded secret, but the playing-speed was very slow except at the corners, where the specially designed whalebone tip would turn with a swift, sharp and completely inaudible jerk on to the next horizontal line of recording. The Tosch system never caught on, but was closely connected with an incident in the life of La Barucci. The great diva had a pet leopard named *Falsi* who accompanied her wherever she went. *Falsi* was let on an emerald-studded chain which was given to Barucci by the *Comte di Caccamacucci* (an enormously rich admirer of the great singer) and whilst Barucci was recording in the Tosch Studio a careless employee had left some completed plates on a footstool near the leopard who ate them when no one was looking. Barucci was at the time recording Phantozzi's variations on the old song *Geh auf vor meinen Fenster, Geh*. Tosch, in a trans-



Giuseppina Barucci as Violetta in La Traviata

port of delight, rushed from the recording pavilion to embrace the singer when *Falsi*, in a fit of pique and jealousy, ate the great inventor, to the horror of all present and thus was lost to posterity one of the real geniuses of the invention of recording. This unfortunate incident was the main cause of Barucci's retirement. Little is known about the latter years of either Giuseppina Barucci or her adored pet, nor can we, alas, hear this fabulous voice on what was, perhaps the most faithful recording method of all. To the few who were lucky enough to hear the square method of recording, it was apparent that there was nothing else quite like it. COLIN SHREVE

NOTES ON THE ARTISTS IN TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME

Arranged in alphabetical order

ADELINA AGOSTINELLI [1882-1954] making her debut in Pavia in 1903, she toured with an opera troupe to Greece, Turkey, Russia, Belgium and Holland. Her greatest successes were in Spain and South America. Following seasons with the Manhattan opera, she appeared at La Scala with Battistini in 1910 (Simon Boccanegra). She later retired to Buenos Aires where she taught singing.

NORMAN ALLIN While most scratchy record members will be familiar with the career of Norman Allin, this selection from William Shield [1748-1829] may pose a something of a surprise. For a while Shield was employed as composer to Covent Garden where he produced many operas. From 1817 he was Master of the King's Music. He wrote many melodious songs as well as interpolating unfamiliar songs by other composers into his stage works. This particular song *Wolf* was also recorded by Peter Dawson.

LOLA ARTOT DE PADILLA [1880-1933]. Born of musical parents, her mother was Desiree Artot and father baritone Mariano Padilla, she made her debut at the Opera-Comique in 1904. After a period with the Komische Oper, she became a permanent member of the Berlin Imperial Opera from 1909-1927.

ENRICO CARUSO [1873-1921] What is there left to say about this tenor! While Pavorotti and others strut their stuff, very few critics or authorities today seem loath to compare Caruso's art with any of the famous trio. Yet when he departed the scene tragically in 1921, many were quick to look for his successor. It befell Beniamino Gigli that he more or less inherited the mantle of Caruso when the merits of his voice was being measured. Is the time gap so great today that any distinctions one might draw between Caruso and our contemporary tenors, become so indistinct that one naturally has to defer such comparisons to old fuddy duddies like record collecting enthusiasts. Surely there are writers out there with the right sort of background who would be willing to chance their arm on the contentious issue of measuring Caruso with Pavorotti!

I think Caruso and Pavorotti possess well focused voices which are ideally suited for modern requirements. However it is interesting to note that no one seems prepared to note any colouring in Pavorotti's voice as he ages. Whereas with Caruso, pundits were quick to point out how it changed from lyrical to dramatic in the space of a decade or so.

COMEDY HARMONISTS Billed as the Comedy Harmonists on their Australasian tour of 1937 divided their programs between serious music and humorous pieces such as the famous vocal version of Rossini's overture to *William Tell*. Some of their comic numbers relied to a certain extent on visual appeal. Hence one Australian critic said audience reactions justified the Broadcasting authorities decision to allow the public to see as well as hear these visiting artists. The ensemble was formed in Germany in 1927 on the example set by an American group called the Revellers.

CYRIL FLETCHER All I can remember about this comedian is the fact that his recordings used to appear regularly on the 2ZB Sunday request session immediately after the war. Programmers seemed to rotate Fletcher's recording with other classics like Arthur Askey's 'Proposal' and Harold Taite's 'Running an Office'. At least that's the way I recall it.

PROGRAMME

PART ONE: As always, we open with some recent additions to our collection

COMEDIAN HARMONISTS

Anno Dazumal - (arr. Morena)
Odeon O-2860 c1928

Sung in the style of the American Group the Revellers.

COMEDY HARMONISTS

Die Dorfmusik (Fryberg-Donop-Kirsten)
HMV B 8779 c.1935

WILLIAM PAULL

In happy moments - Maritana (Wallace)
G&T GC 2-2569 1901

SPECIAL ITEM

To celebrate the recent publication
of Adrienne Simpson's

OPERA'S FARTHEST FRONTIER

STAN FREBERG

The Great Pretender (Ram)
Capital 3396 c1953

PART TWO: 24 Years ago - we played these recordings - see story on page 10

M. GUTHEIL-SCHODER & F. NAVAL

Horst du es tonen mit susser Melodie - Hoffmann (Offenbach)
G&T GC 44067 1902

LILLIAN NORDICA

Hunyadi Laslos (Erkel)
Columbia 74022 1907

ARTOT DE PADILLA

Neue freuden, heue Schmerzen - Non so piu - Nozze (Mozart)
Schallplatte 2-43461 c1914

ADELINA AGOSTINELLI

Vissi d'art - Tosca (Puccini)
Edison 28137 1910

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Tuesday February 18th 1997

MARIA LABIA

Non la sospiri - Tosca (Puccini)
Edison 28153 1911

PART THREE: its all nostalgia with two classical discs to end proceedings.

CLARKSON ROSE

Like the rich folk do
Zonophone 5303 c.1928

CYRIL FLETCHER

The tale of Hector Cramp (Fletcher)
Columbia DO 1934 c.1935

FLOTSAM & JETSAM

The Londoner and the Hun
Columbia DO 2270 1940

JOE LOS & HIS ORCHESTRA

(Vocalist Chick Henderson)
Somewhere in France - Waltz (Carr) & Rosita - Foxtrot (Carr)
Regal Zonophone MR 3230 c1940

NORMAN ALLIN

The Wolf -(Shield)
Columbia DOX 362 c1933

ENRICO CARUSO

Il fior che avevi a me tu dato - Carmen (Bizet)
Victor 85049 VB 57 1905

END OF PROGRAMME

During the first intermission we will play
BARNABAS VON GECZY

Zigeunerweisen (Sarasate)
Electrola EG 3295 1938

During the second intermission we will play

BARNABAS VON GECZY

Blauer himmel - Tango (Rixner)
Electrola EG 3818 c.1938

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FLOTSAM & JETSAM Malcolm McEachern [1883-1945] & B.C.Hilliam [1890-1965]. The partnership of Flotsam & Jetsam lasted over eighteen years, with them obtaining engagements and bookings in music halls, concerts, radio and film. McEachern looked after all the business matters in the partnership while Hilliam supplied all the lyrical and musical material. Peter Dawson on hearing of McEachern's death said the world had been robbed of a Master of Song and one of Australia's greatest ambassadors to the United Kingdom. In the *Record Collector* Vol.27 no.s 7/8, it is noted McEachern toured New Zealand prior to taking up residence in England in 1921. As far as I can work it out, this must have been shortly after the end of the first World War.

STAN FREBERG [1926-] Freberg's parodies have a sense of 'radio' about them which embellishes the rich heritage of American Humour from the two liners of Hope & Crosby to the sardonic wit of Tom Lehrer. A radio personality he eventually drifted into advertising calling himself 'Stan Freberg Unlimited'. Unfortunately his TV appearances were not appreciated to the same extent as his recordings which made him a household name in the 1950s. Often as not these were musically directed by the gifted Billy May. Stan Freberg toured New Zealand in 1958. Michael Woolf, to whom I am are grateful for these biographical notes, will elaborate on this thumb nail with some personal reminiscences.

MARIE GUTHIEL-SCHODER [1874-1935] & **FRANZ NAVAL** [1865-1939] I obtained this record from Dennis Brew at the height of my passion for stars of the Vienna Opera. This interest had been initiated in 1975, when I had the good fortune to acquire a considerable number of records from the estate of Fritz Steiner, a Viennese accountant who had fled Austria after the Anschluss. Both of these singers were idolised in Vienna.

MARIA LABIA [1880-1953] This dramatic soprano was born in Italy . Making her debut in Stockholm in 1905, she then performed Berlin Komische Oper, Manhattan Opera, Paris Opera, Vienna Imperial Opera. She sang the first *Salome* at La Scala. Famed for the melodiousness of her voice and the dramatic passion, she was also esteemed as a great actress.

JOE LOS & HIS ORCHESTRA Born in Liverpool in 1909 Joseph Alexander Loss received his formal musical education at the Trinity College, where he specialised in the violin. He assembled his first band in 1930 for the Astoria Dance Hall in London. Three years later at the Kit Kat Club he made his first recordings. Branching out into broadcasting his signature tune was 'Let's dance at the Make-Believe Ballroom'. Critics have complained that vocalists dominate his recordings. Indeed, the majority of his output in the 1930s were given over almost entirely to popular vocal music, using singers like Jimmy Messini, Chick Henderson, Monte Rey, Harry Chase and Clem Stevens. Continuing into the LP era, his dance recordings were considered excellent tempo wise. He died in 1990. *Notes provided by John Sutcliffe.*

LILIAN NORDICA [1857-1914] Born in America, Nordica's life was crisscrossed with artistic achievements and some personal tragedies. She made her debut at the age of seventeen. She first married in 1883 having sung in Milan, St. Petersburg, German and Paris. After her husband was killed in a ballooning accident in 1885, she returned to the stage, with successes in Covent Garden and the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. She also performed at Bayreuth in 1894 singing Elsa in *Lohengrin*. In 1913 after two further marriages she began her farewell tour around the world. The ship in which she

was travelling was wrecked on the coast of New Guinea. Rescued, she was brought to a hospital in Batavia where she latter died. She sang in New Zealand the year before she died.

WILLIAM PAULL P.G.Hurst in his Golden Age Recorded, stated that although Paull was not a singer of any great standing, he was one of the mainstays of the early G&T general catalogue. Though his style was not polished as some, he was excellent in things such as *A Jovial Monk* and *The Devout Lover*. Hurst then went on to draw attention to the fact that he sometime 'indulged in the unpleasant trick of rolling his R's'. A member of the Carl Rosa Opera Company, he committed suicide in St.Louis in 1903.

CLARKSON ROSE [1890-1968] The following notes on this Comedians career were provided by John Sutcliffe. Clarkson Rose made his London debut in 1915 appearing at the *Gaiety*. He followed this with a string of various Revues which were somewhat revolutionary in their style and concept, (as John will explain). In 1921 he formed the first 'Twinkle' Concert Parties which played at seaside venues. He was also a famous 'Panto Dame'. He recorded extensively for the Zonophone Company in the 1920s often recording as many as six titles for release every month. It would be interesting to know just how much of the material he recorded was formulated by himself. The *Gramophone* magazine obviously thought highly of him featuring him a caricature in their issue dated September 1929 (see accompanying illustration).

BARNABAS VON GECZY This group recorded extensively for Odeon/Parlophone in the late 1920s before shifting over to HMV. Violinist von Geczy was of noble Hungarian parentage and was allegedly courted by the Nazis to become a German citizen. This he refused. Looking back through old *Gramophones* of the 1930s he recorded quite a few classical items including a Beethoven violin sonata for Polydor. Lovers of light music rate his arrangements and ensemble playing ahead of others which included Marek Weber and Albert Salmon's Palm Court Orchestra.



SPECIAL EVENING !

A programme featuring JOHN McCORMACK has been devised by Des Wilson and Bill Main to occupy the space left vacant by Ilmar's departure for India.

All welcome. Further details will be announced closer to the event in July.

REFLECTIONS ON WHAT I COLLECT

For those of you who have a good memory, I have chosen to play five items tonight that I originally played to the group on the 28th May 1973 - nearly 24 years ago!

What brought this about is the fact that I have in my papers a report from JACK ROOT who made notes about the evening and subsequently circulated typed copies of these minutes to members.

In Jack's inimitable style he reported that those present that evening at 93 Burma Road included D. Cameron, J & R Root, J. Kerr W & J Main, P & C Flight, I Clark(?) and H Sansum. He went onto report I had selected a programme of 'Musical Rarities', which was selected under the following criteria. 1: The record was rare. 2: The item recorded was rarely recorded. 3: The artist had made few discs or cylinders.

Using this selection process, I launched forth into playing recordings by Medea Mei-Figner, Lillian Nordica, Doris Vane, Bidu Sayao, Emma Calve, Fritzi Jokl, Margarita Seims, Lola Artot de Padilla, Frances Saville, duetists Schoder & Naval, Adelina Agostinelli, Helen Wildbrun, Maria Labia and Zenia Belmas. Fourteen records in total. It is therefore a sobering thought to realise that I only have five of these records left in my collection!

No they have not been broken!

The main reason for this are that my tastes have naturally changed over the years.

As Michael Woolf once remarked, if I continued thinning my collection to a point whereby I only retained examples of the highest order, then I should only have a handful of records left when I shed this mortal coil!

Be that as it may, I still continue to add records to my collection and then after several playings spread over a couple of months, cull them if they don't measure up. Fortunately it rarely irks me to think I did a foolish thing in doing away with such apparently attractive material at the time. After all beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Too often I found a lot of artists simply didn't come up to my expectations. Perhaps I didn't have the right approach which it takes to fill in the gaps. If that was the downside to my collecting, then there was the positive aspect which saw me recognise merit in another's recordings. Even better was discovering an artist whose records have never been written up to any degree. This is still the most exciting facet of collecting records in my opinion along with being zapped by yet another incredible performance of standard arias like *Largo al Factotum*. Do others in the group attempt to keep their collection under control, or do Magpies rule the roost!

Concluding his enlightening report of the 28th, Jack ended by saying 'the meeting concluded with one of William's popular book sales and Mrs Main's full bodied pikelets!' He also urged us to meet again at Ray Hedges, 170 Aro Street on Monday 30th July at 8pm.

Over to you Ray - do you remember what you played on that occasion?

Bill Main

PICTURE PUZZLE PAGE

Answer all questions correctly and get a free cup of coffee at the New Zealand Centre for Photography!

Picture A

Who is the Soprano smiling so radiantly at the camera in 1932. 1 mark. For a bonus mark, name the dog (a) Jack (b) Bob (c) George. Picture by Courtesy of MEMORIES.



Picture B

Who is the ballerina surrounded by sheep in 1922. 1 mark. For a bonus mark are they (a) Southdowns (b) Merinos (c) Cross breeds. Picture by Courtesy of MEMORIES.



Picture C

Who is the singer attempting to bridge the cultural differences (a) Anna Hato (b) Kiri te Kanawa (c) Clara Butt 1 mark. For a bonus mark name the tribe she adopted during her NZ tour in 1908. (a) Ngati Arawa (b) Ngati Poneke (c) Ngati Poru. Picture by Courtesy of Alexander Turnbull Library.

