

A LEGENDARY AIDA

The ruinous competition between HMV and Columbia, before they were subsumed into the new EMI in 1931, reached its apogee at the end of 1928, when both labels recorded *Aida* in Milan in a matter of weeks. HMV made their recording on 3 October - 15 December; meanwhile Columbia weighed in with *La Traviata* (1 - 10 November), *Aida* (10 - 20 November) and *La Bohème* (24 November - 3 December).

History has favoured the HMV *Aida*, mainly on account of the blazing portrayal of Radamès by Aureliano Pertile. Columbia fielded two paragons, Giannina Arangi-Lombardi as Aida and Tancredi Pasero as Ramfis, as well as splendid interpreters of Azucena and Amonasro; but the clinching factor was the conducting of HMV's Carlo Sabajno, who got superb responses from the chorus and orchestra of La Scala, honed for almost a decade by Arturo Toscanini. For Columbia, Lorenzo Molajoli had the same chorus but a mixed orchestra with some leading La Scala players including concertmaster Enrico Minetti.

Pertile (1885-1952) was the acknowledged leading tenor at La Scala during Toscanini's second spell in charge, the 1920s. Although his faults as a singer will be apparent to any listener, they were far outweighed by his intelligence, histrionic talent and intensity as an interpreter. For him, recitatives were never just conduits to the next aria: every word mattered. He sang with a real *mezza voce* and a vast dynamic range; and although his tone was not conventionally alluring, he had such a clear idea of the beauty of what he was conveying that he outshone most rivals.

His Aida was a relative newcomer, Italo-American soprano Dusolina Giannini (1902-86), daughter of a tenor and a violinist and sister of a composer. She and Pertile had triumphed together in their roles at Covent Garden earlier in 1928 and her clean singing of the title role on this set made her many friends. Her recording career lasted only until 1934 but she appeared on stage until the early 1950s. Her discs of art songs are prized.

As Amneris we hear one of the most exciting Italian mezzo-sopranos, Irene Minghini-Cattaneo (1892-1944), a favourite in South America and at La Scala and heard in the 1928 Covent Garden *Aida* with Pertile and Giannini. She would sing Azucena on HMV's *Trovatore* with Pertile and take contralto and dramatic soprano roles as well as her warhorses, retiring in 1941. A melancholy connection with Columbia's *Aida* is that the Amonasro of that set, Armando Borgioli, and Minghini-Cattaneo were both killed by Allied bombing.

The Amonasro here, Giovanni Inghilleri (1894-1959), enjoyed a long career and was still in good enough shape to take part in Renata Tebaldi's first recordings of *Madama Butterfly* and *La Bohème*. Before his 1919 stage debut he was a pianist and répétiteur; and he was regarded as one of Italy's most musical baritones. Much admired at Covent Garden and other European centres, he did not reach La Scala until 1941.

The basses make a contrasting pair. The fine basso cantante Luigi Manfrini (1880-1931) also featured in the HMV *Bohème* and was Covent Garden's Oroveso in 1928-29 to Ponselle's Norma. He would have only one full year of singing left, as he was taken ill in 1930 and retired at his peak. Guglielmo Masini, a secondo basso with a distinctive tone, took leading roles at lesser Italian houses and made solo and ensemble discs for HMV. His career lasted two decades until 1940.

The role of the Messenger was sung for both HMV and Columbia with characteristic panache by that great comprimario tenor Giuseppe Nessi (1887-1961), whose career endured for 49 years.

TULLY POTTER



disc one (79:30)

1. Preludio (4:17)
15 Dec 28; CF 2352-5 (HMV D 1595)

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

2. Sì, corre voce (1:38)
6 Oct 28; CF 2345-1 (HMV D 1595)
3. Se quel guerriero io fossi! . . . Celeste Aida (4:16)
6 Oct 28; CF 2344-1T1 (HMV D 1596)
4. Quale insolita gioia nel tuo sguardo! (3:33)
6 Oct 28; CF 2343-2 (HMV D 1596)
5. Vieni, o diletta (4:24)
19 Oct 28; CF 2390-1 (HMV D 1597)
6. Sì: guerra e morte (4:07)
19 Oct 28; CF 2391-1T1 (HMV D 1597)
7. Ritorna vincitor! (2:50)
18 Oct 28; CF 2383-1A (HMV D 1598)
8. I sacri nomi di padre, d'amante (3:10)
26 Oct 28; CF 2417-1 (HMV D 1598)

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

9. Immenso Fthà (3:18)
26 Oct 28; CF 2416-1A (HMV D 1599)
10. Danza sacra delle sacerdotesse (2:13)
12 Oct 28; CF 2365-2 (HMV D 1599)
11. Mortal diletto ai numi (4:59)
6 Oct 28; CF 2346-1 (HMV D 1600)

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

12. Chi mai fra gl'inni (4:32)
25 Oct 28; CF 2414-2A (HMV D 1600)
13. Vieni, sul crin (4:19)
25 Oct 28; CF 2415-2A (HMV D 1601)
14. Ebben, qual nuovo fremito (2:52)
18 Oct 28; CF 2382-2 (HMV D 1601)
15. Pietà ti prenda (4:27)
24 Oct 28; CF 2413-2A (HMV D 1602)

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

16. Gloria all'Egitto (4:22)
13 Oct 28; CF 2370-1 (HMV D 1602)
17. Ballabile (4:33)
19 Nov 28; CF 2353-4 (HMV D 1603)
18. Vieni, o guerriero vindice (2:25)
18 Oct 28; CF 2386-1 (HMV D 1603)
19. Salvator della patria (3:06)
19 Oct 28; CF 2392-2A (HMV D 1604)
20. Quest'assisa ch'io vesto (4:38)
24 Oct 28; CF 2412-2 (HMV D 1604)
21. O Re, pei sacri numi (2:10)
24 Oct 28; CF 2411-2A (HMV D 1605)
22. Venga or la schiava (3:21)
18 Oct 28; CF 2385-1A (HMV D 1605)

disc two (61:31)

ACT THREE

1. O tu che sei d'Osiride (4:23)
12 Oct 28; CF 2364-2A (HMV D 1606)
2. Qui Radamès verrà! . . . O patria mia (2:41)
18 Oct 28; CF 2384-1A (HMV D 1606)
3. O cieli azzurri (3:56)
26 Oct 28; CF 2418-2A (HMV D 1607)
4. Ciel! mio padre! (3:46)
16 Oct 28; CF 2381-1A (HMV D 1607)
5. Su, dunque! sorgete, egizie coorti! (3:59)
24 Oct 28; CF 2408-2AT1 (HMV D 1608)

6. Pur ti riveggo (3:03)
24 Oct 28; CF 2409-1 (HMV D 1608)
7. Fuggiam gli ardori (4:12)
24 Oct 28; CF 2410-2 (HMV D 1609)
8. Aida! Tu non m'ami (2:54)
16 Oct 28; CF 2380-2A (HMV D 1609)
9. Tu! Amonasro! (2:55)
16 Oct 28; CF 2379-2A (HMV D 1610)

ACT FOUR, SCENE ONE

10. L'abborrita rivale a me sfuggia (4:21)
5 Oct 28; CF 2338-2A (HMV D 1610)
11. Ah, tu dei vivere! (4:35)
5 Oct 28; CF 2339-1A (HMV D 1611)
12. Ohimè! morir me sento! (4:07)
13 Oct 28; CF 2369-2A (HMV D 1611)
13. Radamès, Radamès (3:54)
13 Oct 28; CF 2371-1A (HMV D 1612)
14. Sacerdoti: compiste un delitto (2:39)
15 Oct 28; CF 2372-2A [part] (HMV D 1612)

ACT FOUR, SCENE TWO

15. La fatal pietra (2:04)
15 Oct 28; CF 2372-2A [part] (HMV D 1612)
16. Presago il core (3:33)
15 Oct 28; CF 2373-2A (HMV D 1613)
17. O terra, addio (4:28)
15 Oct 28; CF 2374-1A (HMV D 1613)

Orchestra and Chorus of Teatro alla Scala
conducted by Carlo Sabajno



Producer and Audio Restoration
Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

CAST

Aida – Dusolina Giannini
Amneris – Irene Minghini-Cattaneo
Radamès – Aureliano Pertile
Amonasro – Giovanni Inghilleri
Il Re (Pharaoh) – Guglielmo Masini
Ramfis – Luigi Manfrini
Un Messaggero – Giuseppe Nessi
Sacerdotessa – Cantoni

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Teatro alla Scala, Milan

Total duration: 2hr 21:01



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