

"British audiences do not take to Manon. *Tant pis!* They feel that if an operatic heroine is no better than she ought to be (Mimi) or actually a wrong 'un (*La Traviata*), the least she can do is to expire in such a way as to cause general relief. But poor Manon causes the utmost inconvenience even by her death, whether on the road to Le Havre (Massenet) or in the desert (Puccini) of some noisy complaint with symptoms not unlike 'flu. But I am devoted to her and also an addict of what Professor Dent has called the Puccinian marijuana, so I rejoice in this long overdue complete remake, for the first two acts contain some of Puccini's most heady and voluptuous music wonderfully counterbalanced (as in the mosaic patterns of *La Bohème*) with little touches of elegance and atmospherics. What a master he is in "selling" you a tune first in little dribblets and then simply stunning you with it when you are just sufficiently intoxicated!

The tenor's "Donna non vidi mai" and the soprano's "In quelle trine" and the *intermezzo* are constantly in the catalogues, but the great duet of passion in Act II has been far too long absent. It is a superb example of the Puccinian duet of erotic character-clash: the gentleman hurling reproach, the lady pleading, the gent being won over, the triumphant unison, the infatuated tugging and skirling. The old versions by Sheridan and Pertile, Latuada and Valente, and Zamboni and Merli (in the complete Columbia of long ago) still offer a wonderful idea of how much "binge" the duet gives off. This beefily sung new recording of it is of course gorgeous, but it is not superior as far as getting the most out of the duet goes. The standard of recording is up to Decca's best (enough said), but artistry is not a direction in which we have made such strides.

Acts III and IV are less good Puccini. Des Grieux's quayside sobbings can be very exciting, but Manon's long death never touches me as nearly all the other dying Puccini heroines have moved me. Yet the work as a whole yields great delight."

P.H.-W., *The Gramophone*, February 1955

The recording of *Manon Lescaut* made in Rome by Decca in the summer 1954 was one of their earliest ventures into the world of stereo – indeed it would not be issued in this format for almost two decades after the recording was made. The engineer responsible in the early days was Roy Wallace – subject of a letter to *Gramophone* magazine in March 1993:

"Having joined Decca at their Broadhurst Gardens Studios in April 1953, Wallace (born 1927) was selected by Arthur Haddy to investigate the feasibility of stereo recording on behalf of the company. As a trained engineer it was he who not only designed and built their first stereo mixer but also balanced the first experimental session on November 23rd, 1953 at the Decca studios with Mantovani and his Orchestra. (The rough drawings of his microphone set-up still survive.) Having proved to Haddy and others that stereo recording was a practical reality he worked long hours during the early months of 1954 to build a suitable mixer which would prove both reliable and transportable. Having completed the construction of his equipment Wallace travelled with his mono colleagues Gill Went and Cyril H. Baker who were to balance a series of sessions in Victoria Hall, Geneva with Ernest Ansermet and the Suisse Romande Orchestra under producer Victor Olof. Decca's first serious stereo session took place on May 13th, 1954 with Rimsky-Korsakov's *Antar*. Wallace worked entirely on his own, without any musical supervision, experimenting with his microphone positioning.

Decca's next stereo project was in Rome between July 13th and August 8th with the first stereo recordings of three complete operas — *Otello* (Tebaldi/del Monaco/Protti), *Manon Lescaut* (Tebaldi/del Monaco) and *La traviata* (Tebaldi/Poggi/Protti). Again, these were totally experimental with Wallace in charge of the stereo equipment." (excerpt of letter from Malcolm Walker)

Whilst Decca's more famous recording engineer, Kenneth Wilkinson, only began working in stereo in January 1957, Wallace continued working on the Rome (and Florence) opera recordings until the early 1960s. And whilst his work might have been considered experimental at the time, it has stood the test of time and here, some 69 years later, with the assistance of Pristine's XR remastering processes, sounds truly magnificent – a fine tribute to all involved.

Andrew Rose



PACO 201

puccini

manon lescaut

renata tebaldi
mario del monaco

mario bonifoglio
fernando corena
piero de palma
antonio sacchetti
luisa ribacchi

santa cecilia academy
chorus & orchestra

conducted by
francesco molinari-pradelli

Pristine
XR

stereo studio recording, 1954

disc one
(79:14)

ACT ONE

1. Ave, sera gentile (4:26)
2. L'amor? l'amor? (0:59)
3. Tra voi, belle, brune e bionde (1:15)
4. Ma bravo! (1:42)
5. Descendono, vediamo! Viaggiatori eleganti, galanti! (1:58)
6. Cortese damigella, il priego mio accettate (3:47)
7. Donna non vidi mai simile a questa! (2:07)
8. La tua ventura, ci rassicura (5:11)
9. Vecchietto amabile (2:32)
10. Vedete? Io son fedele alla parola mia (3:34)
11. Non c'è più vino? E che? Vuota è la botte? (1:37)
12. Di sedur la sorellina è il momento! (3:47)

ACT TWO

13. Despettosetto questo riccio! (5:01)
14. In quelle trine morbide (1:53)
15. Poiché tu vuoi saper, Des Grieux (2:48)
16. Che ceffi son costor? Ciarlatani o speciali? (1:54)
17. Paga costor! (1:14)
18. Minuetto (7:49)
19. Oh, sarò la più bella! (7:14)
20. Ah! Affè, madamigella (2:07)
21. Senti, di qui partiamo (2:59)
22. Lescaut! Tu qui? (3:17)

disc two
(37:43)

1. Intermezzo (4:59)

ACT THREE

2. Ansia eterna, crudel (3:48)
3. E Kate rispose al Re (2:26)
4. All'armi! All'armi! (1:40)
5. Rosetta! Eh! Che aria! (3:28)
6. Presto! In fila! Marciate! (3:22)

ACT FOUR

7. Tutta su me ti posa (2:40)
8. Manon, senti, amor mio! (1:48)
9. Sei tu che piangi? (4:33)
10. Sola, perduta, abbandonata (3:22)
11. Fra le tue braccia, amore, l'ultima volta! (5:39)

Santa Cecilia Academy Chorus & Orchestra
conducted by Francesco Molinari-Pradelli

PRISTINE
AUDIO

PACO 201

CAST

Renata Tebaldi (soprano) - Manon Lescaut
Mario Boriello (baritone) - Lescaut
Mario Del Monaco (tenor) - Des Grieux
Fernando Corena (bass) - Geronte
Piero de Palma (tenor) - Edmondo
Antonio Sacchetti (baritone) - Innkeeper & Sergeant
Luisa Ribacchi (mezzo-soprano) - Musician
Adelio Zagonara (tenor) - Dancing Master
Angelo Mercuriali (tenor) - Lamplighter
Dario Caselli (bass) - Captain

Recorded at Santa Cecilia, Rome,
13-31 July 1954
Stereo producer: James Walker
Stereo engineer: Roy Wallace

XR remastering by: Andrew Rose
Cover artwork: Renata Tebaldi as Manon

Total duration: 1hr 46:57

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