



# **Beniamino GIGLI**

**New York Recordings 1929-30**

**VERDI**

**BIZET**

**DONIZETTI**

**DE CURTIS**

**DENZA**

**KREISLER**

**SEISMIT-DODA**

## Beniamino Gigli (1890-1957)

### The Gigli Edition Vol. 6 • New York Recordings 1929-30

These were the final years of Gigli's major career in America, and they overlapped with his surprisingly delayed Covent Garden début, which took place on 27th May 1930 in *Andrea Chénier*. He returned to London in opera in 1931, 1938 and 1939 and with the touring San Carlo company in 1946.

It was not until 1930 that the Met revived *L'elisir d'amore* for Gigli, and he won a major success as Nemorino, a rôle well suited to his stage presence. That what seemed like such an inevitable bit of casting had not occurred sooner was owing to the superstitious Gatti-Casazza, the General Manager of the company, who had nightmare memories of the night in Brooklyn, 11th December 1920 when a performance of *L'elisir* with Caruso had to be halted at the end of Act 1 as the tenor's throat was haemorrhaging. Gigli's 1929 recording of '*Una furtiva lagrima*' is very fine, the phonation exquisitely graded, and the transitions to the maggiore sections broadly sustained. It is only in the run in the cadenza that his lack of easy velocity is apparent. Many a lesser tenor might execute that run more smoothly, but it is hard to think of another one who could sing the rest of the aria with the same sweet sincerity that Gigli lavishes upon it.

The day before he recorded *Una furtiva lagrima*, he addressed himself to Nadir's aria from Bizet's *Pearl Fishers*, once again performing a French aria in Italian. There is great control, some well calibrated *messe di voce*, but to some his use of a mixed head voice in the final phrases might sound effete.

In the Sunday night concerts that were a feature of the Met in those days, Gigli had on several occasions participated in the trio from *I Lombardi*. In this recording the tenor as the dying Oronte is joined by Rethberg (Giselda) and Pinza (Pagano turned Eremita). This is an emotional situation and Gigli has no stiff upper lip here, as when he asks Giselda to

bathe him with her tears ('*bagnami col tuo, col tuo pianto*'). The closing section is quite powerful with soprano and tenor on healthy unison high Bs and the bass supporting them with columns of sounds. The same forces tackle the trio from Act 3 of Verdi's *Attila*. Rethberg sings the lines of Odabella; Gigli, those of Foresto; and Pinza, those of the baritone (so appropriately named in this case) Ezio. In this rather static number Odabella seems to be betraying her beloved Foresto by marrying Attila, but only as a ruse to be able to stab him. Foresto, unaware of her motives, chides her apparent faithlessness, and Ezio wants them to stop their personal wrangling, as his army is ready to attack the Huns. As a performance, the three sing '*Te sol quest'anima*' quite straightforwardly, but its chief interest, to me at least, is the impressive way Pinza handles his high tessitura.

As he had done before, Gigli addressed himself to that seemingly inexhaustible repertory of Italian and Neapolitan songs that belong to the genre that can be characterized as *popolaresco*. This material is designed to have immediate appeal; the tunes characteristically have two strophes in the minor, each rounded out with a refrain in the parallel major. Gigli's approach to these songs is direct, involved, and artfully spontaneous - one is always aware that this singer understands singing.

One of the most immediately approachable songs is *Musica proibita* by Stanislaw Gajdardzki (1861-1939). Gajdardzki is worthy of a footnote in opera history, as he won second place in the 1889 Sonzogno competition for a one-act opera, the same competition that launched Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* to worldwide success. The odd thing, however, is that as part of his prize, Gajdardzki had his opera performed at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome on 19th April 1890, less than a month before the première of Mascagni's opera

(Gastaldon's work, *Mala Pasqua*, was derived from the same Verga play that was the source of *Cavalleria rusticana*). *Musica proibita* has an appealing melody, and Gigli makes much of the second refrain, *Vorrei baciare i tuoi capelli neri, le labbra tue, gl'occhi tuoi severi*.

Albano Seismit-Doda's *Notte lunare* tells the tale of a man painfully disillusioned in love, but the rising of the full moon restores hope. The varied emotions of this song are starkly depleted by Gigli. Denza's *Se* is more varied musically than some of these songs, and Gigli gives a burnished account of it. De Curtis's *Carmela*, sung with contagious high spirits may be taken as a touchstone of the *popolare* genre, as it seems to invite the listener to join in.

Although Gigli's contract with the Metropolitan was to have run until 1935, he left the company in an atmosphere of acrimony at the end of the 1932 season. When he refused to accept the voluntary ten per cent cut in salary that everyone else had accepted, Gatti-Casazza

dismissed him summarily. If Gigli's future in the United States seemed questionable, he was rapturously received in Italy, where he appeared frequently all over the peninsula and elsewhere in Europe. He was, quite simply, idolised by his compatriots in these years before the war. Not only did he perform in opera, but he gave concerts, sang over the radio, and made a series of very popular films. In these movies, Gigli's simple directness of manner (he always played himself) compensated to some degree for his quite limited range as an actor. He relied on his expressive voice to do his acting for him. I think that this explains the continuing appeal of Gigli's recordings. Not only was his an uncommonly beautiful instrument, but he was irrepressibly and instinctively communicative. If on occasion he seems almost too promptly emotional, one never for a moment doubts his sincerity.

**William Ashbrook**

## Producer's Note

The present volume is the sixth in a series devoted to Beniamino Gigli's "singles" - his song and aria recordings not issued as part of complete opera sets. The aim of the series is to include every Gigli recording released at the time, as well as every published alternate take and, wherever available, unpublished takes. The sides here are presented in the order in which they were recorded.

Except for the unpublished take of *Notte lunare* (Track 2) which makes its first appearance here, the selections on the current volume were originally issued in 1996 as part of Romophone 82005-2 ("Beniamino Gigli - The Complete Victor Recordings, Volume III: 1929-32"). In remastering my original transfers, I have tried to remove some of the clicks and pops that remained (both manually via digital editing and through the use of the CEDAR declicking module) and have made adjustments to the equalization of each track. Some clicks and other noises could not be removed unobtrusively, particularly on unique copies of unpublished test pressings, and have so been left in place.

**Mark Obert-Thorn**

The Naxos historical label aims to make available the greatest recordings in the history of recorded music, in the best and truest sound that contemporary technology can provide. To achieve this aim, Naxos has engaged a number of respected restorers who have the dedication, skill and experience to produce restorations that have set new standards in the field of historical recordings.

|  |      |  |                                       |  |  |
|--|------|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>SEISMIT-DODA:</b>   |      |  | <b>BIZET: Les pêcheurs de perles:</b> |  |  |
| <b>[1] Notte lunare</b>  | 4:12 | <b>[6] Je crois entendre encore (Act 1)</b>  | 4:03                                  |  |  |
| Recorded 8th January 1929<br>in Liederkrantz Hall, New York<br>Matrix: CVE-49049-1<br>First issued on Victor 7261                  |      | (Sung in Italian)<br>Recorded 18th December 1929<br>in Liederkrantz Hall, New York<br>Matrix: CVE-58819-3<br>First issued on HMV AGSB 56 |                                       |  |  |
| <b>SEISMIT-DODA:</b>   |      |  | <b>DONIZETTI: L'elisir d'amore:</b>   |  |  |
| <b>[2] Notte lunare</b>  | 4:08 | <b>[7] Una furtiva lagrima (Act 2)</b>   | 4:17                                  |  |  |
| Recorded 8th January 1929<br>in Liederkrantz Hall, New York<br>Matrix: CVE-49049-2<br>Previously unpublished                       |      | Recorded 19th December 1929<br>in Liederkrantz Hall, New York<br>Matrix: CVE-58123-1<br>First issued on Victor 7194                      |                                       |  |  |
| <b>FLOTOW: Martha:</b>   |      |  | <b>DENZA:</b>                         |  |  |
| <b>[3] M'appari (Act 3)</b>  | 3:40 | <b>[8] Se</b>  | 4:09                                  |  |  |
| Recorded 8th January 1929<br>in Liederkrantz Hall, New York<br>Matrix: CVE-27995-4<br>First issued on Victor 7109                  |      | Recorded 19th December 1929<br>in Liederkrantz Hall, New York<br>Matrix: CVE-58125-2<br>First issued on Victor 7261                      |                                       |  |  |
| <b>PONCHIELLI: La Gioconda:</b>  |      |  | <b>GASTALDON:</b>                     |  |  |
| <b>[4] Cielo e mar! (Act 2)</b>  | 4:34 | <b>[9] Musica proibita</b>   | 4:05                                  |  |  |
| Recorded 18th December 1929<br>in Liederkrantz Hall, New York<br>Matrix: CVE-58118-2<br>First issued on Victor 7194                |      | Recorded 4th December 1930<br>in RCA Victor Studio No. 2, New York<br>Matrix: CVE-64390-1<br>First issued on Victor 7400                 |                                       |  |  |
| <b>BIZET: Les pêcheurs de perles:</b>  |      |  | <b>DE CURTIS:</b>                     |  |  |
| <b>[5] Je crois entendre encore (Act 1)</b>  | 4:00 | <b>[10] Carmela</b>  | 3:04                                  |  |  |
| (Sung in Italian)<br>Recorded 18th December 1929<br>in Liederkrantz Hall, New York<br>Matrix: CVE-58819-1<br>Unpublished on 78 rpm |      | Recorded 4th December 1930<br>in RCA Victor Studio No. 2, New York<br>Matrix: BVE-64391-1<br>First issued on Victor 1575                 |                                       |  |  |

- KREISLER:**
- 11 **Vecchio ritornello** 3:27  
Recorded 11th December 1930  
in RCA Victor Studio No. 2, New York  
Matrix: BVE-67704-1  
First issued on Victor 1575
- DENZA:**
- 12 **Occhi turchini** 3:34  
Recorded 11th December 1930  
in RCA Victor Studio No. 2, New York  
Matrix: CVE-67705-1  
First issued on Victor 8222
- NUTILE:**
- 13 **Mamma mia, che vo' sapè?** 3:46  
Recorded 11th December 1930  
in RCA Victor Studio No. 2, New York  
Matrix: CVE-58124-3  
First issued on Victor 7400
- VERDI: I Lombardi**
- 14 **Or non più dinanzi al cielo...** 4:15  
**Qual voluttà trascorrere (Act 3)**  
with Elisabeth Rethberg, soprano; Ezio Pinza, bass  
Recorded 31st December 1930  
in RCA Victor Studio No. 2, New York  
Matrix: CVE-67748-1  
Unpublished on 78 rpm
- VERDI: I Lombardi**
- 15 **Or non più dinanzi al cielo...** 4:15  
**Qual voluttà trascorrere (Act 3)**  
with Elisabeth Rethberg, soprano; Ezio Pinza, bass  
Recorded 31st December 1930  
in RCA Victor Studio No. 2, New York  
Matrix: CVE-67748-2  
First issued on Victor 8194
- VERDI: Attila:**
- 16 **Te sol quest'anima (Act 3)** 3:09  
with Elisabeth Rethberg, soprano; Ezio Pinza, bass  
Recorded 31st December 1930  
in RCA Victor Studio No. 2, New York  
Matrix: CVE-67749-1  
Unpublished on 78 rpm
- VERDI: Attila:**
- 17 **Te sol quest'anima (Act 3)** 3:03  
with Elisabeth Rethberg, soprano; Ezio Pinza, bass  
Recorded 31st December 1930  
in RCA Victor Studio No. 2, New York  
Matrix: CVE-67749-2  
First issued on Victor 8194
- Tracks 1-2:  
Orchestra conducted by Bruno Reibold
- Tracks 3-17:  
Orchestra conducted by Rosario Bourdon
- Tracks 10 and 13:  
Sung in Neapolitan dialect



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ADD

Beniamino Gigli

The Gigli Edition, Vol. 6

New York Recordings 1929-30

Playing  
Time  
66:51

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MADE IN  
CANADA



- 1 SEISMIT-DODA: Notte lunare
- 2 SEISMIT-DODA: Notte lunare (Previously unpublished take)
- 3 FLOTOW: Martha: M'appari
- 4 PONCHIELLI: La Gioconda: Cielo e mar!
- 5 BIZET: Les pêcheurs de perles: Je crois entendre encore  
(Sung in Italian) (Unpublished on 78 rpm)
- 6 BIZET: Les pêcheurs de perles: Je crois entendre encore  
(Sung in Italian) (Matrix: CVE-58819-3)
- 7 DONIZETTI: L'elisir d'amore: Una furtiva lagrima
- 8 DENZA: Se
- 9 GASTALDON: Musica proibita
- 10 DE CURTIS: Carmela
- 11 KREISLER: Vecchio ritornello
- 12 DENZA: Occhi turchini
- 13 NUTILE: Mamma mia, che vo' sapè?
- 14 VERDI: I Lombardi: Or non più dinanzi al cielo...  
Qual voluttà trascorrere (Previously unpublished take)
- 15 VERDI: I Lombardi: Or non più dinanzi al cielo...  
Qual voluttà trascorrere
- 16 VERDI: Attila: Te sol quest'anima  
(Previously unpublished take)
- 17 VERDI: Attila: Te sol quest'anima  
Tracks 14-17 with Elisabeth Rethberg, Soprano; Ezio Pinza, Bass

The present volume is the sixth in a series devoted to Beniamino Gigli's 'singles' - his song and aria recordings not issued as part of complete opera sets. The aim of the series is to include every Gigli recording released at the time, as well as every published alternative take and, wherever available, unpublished takes. The sides here are presented in the order in which they were recorded. For this Naxos series, restoration engineer Mark Obert-Thorn has remastered his original, critically-acclaimed Romophone transfers, cleaning them up further and re-doing some tracks in their entirety. Of particular interest in this sixth volume are the exquisite rendition of *Una furtiva lagrima*, the two takes of the trio from *I Lombardi* and the appealingly spontaneous renditions of Italian and Neapolitan songs.

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn  
Special thanks to Ward Marston, Lawrence Holdridge, Jim Peters,  
David Norbeck and Mark Ricaldone • Previously released on Romophone

[www.naxos.com](http://www.naxos.com)

A complete track list can be found in the booklet  
Cover image: Gigli as Edgardo in Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor  
(from the Mark Ricaldone photograph collection of Beniamino Gigli)

