

Giacomo Meyerbeer:  
A Discography of Vintage Recordings  
1889 - 1955



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1889 - 1955

By

Richard Arsenty  
and  
Robert Ignatius Letellier

**CAMBRIDGE**  
**SCHOLARS**  

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

Giacomo Meyerbeer: A Discography of Vintage Recordings 1889 - 1955,  
By Richard Arsenty and Robert Ignatius Letellier

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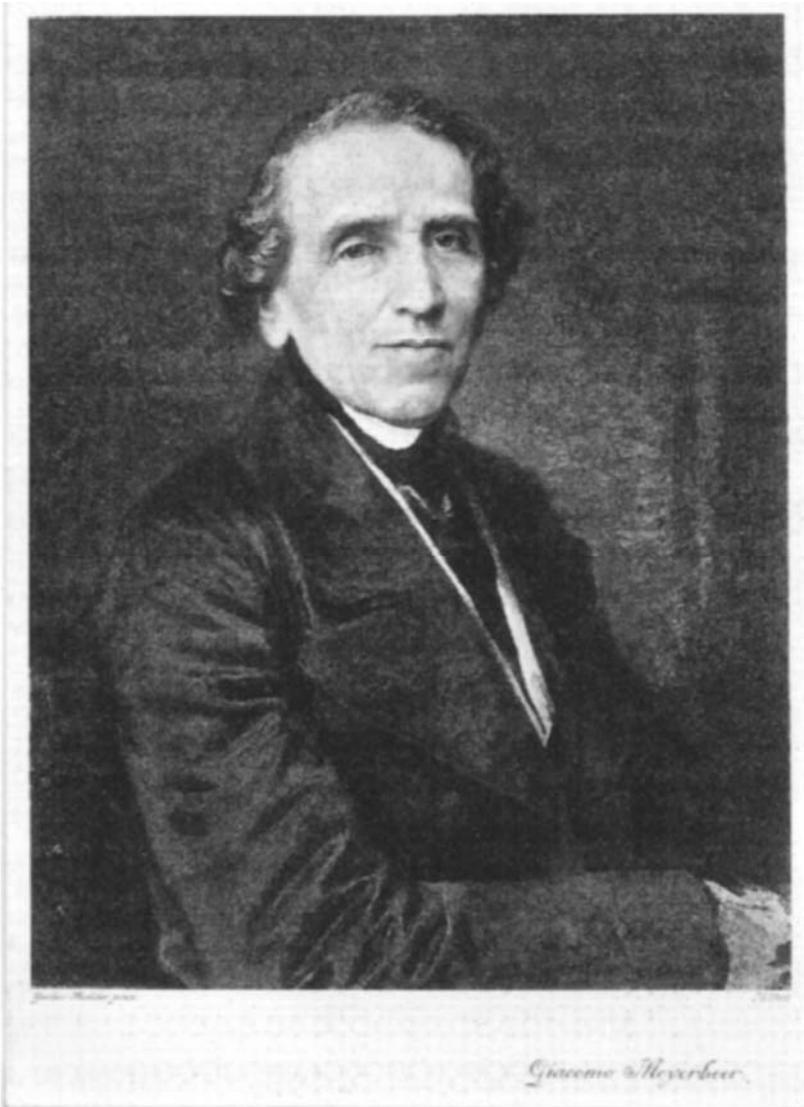
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Giacomo Meyerbeer. Painting by Gustave Richter (c. 1855)

In memory of Richard Arseny  
dedicated scholar, esteemed colleague  
and devoted friend

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## FOREWORD

This work is a tribute to the memory and scholarship of Richard Arsenty, my esteemed colleague and friend, who died on 29 June 2013. It forms part of a series of projects we undertook together, devoted to the life and works of the great opera composer Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864). This joint endeavour found one of its most significant expressions in the edition of *The Complete Libretti of Giacomo Meyerbeer* that Richard and I were engaged on for years (Cambridge Scholars' Publishing, hardback, 5 vols, 2004; paperback, 11 vols, 2008). As well as compiling, collating and editing the texts of Meyerbeer's songs, cantatas and religious works, we were also researching a catalogue of recordings inspired by Richard's substantial collection of 78 r.p.m. discs and his years of careful investigation into the field of antique recordings. Only illness in the last few years of Richard's life prevented an earlier emergence of this work, which now appears as posthumous homage to him, and a continuation of our joint efforts at expanding and developing knowledge of the composer.

Richard's labours on the discography began with his determination to catalogue his growing historical record collection in 1982. Because of the number of recordings, and the recurrence of the composer's name among these pieces, he began to narrow the focus down to Meyerbeer in 1983, and started collating in detail the number of Meyerbeer discs coming his way.

My own interest began in 1967 while still young, when the Heritage/Saga LP transfer of vintage recordings from *Les Huguenots* appeared. This recital, using pieces emanating from the early days of the gramophone, alerted me to the vast musical heritage of a bygone age. At that stage this was the only music from Meyerbeer's most famous opera available to the public. The recordings were mysterious and strange, coming as they did from different times and places, speaking remotely to the present, providing a glimpse into a forgotten world of operatic vibrancy and dimly remembered singing traditions. It opened an enticing perspective onto one of the richest resources available in the story of recorded sound in general, and the history of opera in particular, involving as it did singers, recording and lyric techniques, as well as changing tastes and perceptions.

This experience was corroborated and deepened by acquaintance with a pioneering article by Vivian Liff and Richard Bebb, published in 1968 in the periodical *Opera* (expanded 1986, revised and further expanded in 2007 for inclusion in *Giacomo Meyerbeer: A Reader*), that examined an extensive group of historical recordings from *Les Huguenots*, presenting well-informed and critical evaluations of the singers, and cogently observing how the nature and innate beauty of the music was profoundly affected by the appropriate vocal style and tone. The article was of great interest, and I later learned that this important essay had played a similarly influential role in the musical perceptions of Richard Arseny, as well as for the renowned collector and producer, Ward Marston. The nature and purpose of this book, and the collections behind it, are explained perfectly by the latter—an expert and connoisseur in the history of recorded singing—in an article written for the release of the Marston CD anthology ‘Meyerbeer on Record, 1899-1913’ in 2009:

“...there is a rich legacy of recordings that, if disseminated, might help to foster a renewed interest in Meyerbeer’s music and help to restore him to the place in musical history he deserves. This large body of historic Meyerbeer recordings has largely been ignored, much of it inaccessible to all but the most diligent collectors. Close examination of this legacy reveals a lost world of performance style, elements of which certainly hark back to Meyerbeer’s own time. No doubt singing styles were changing during the 35 years that separated Meyerbeer’s death from the emergence of commercial recording, but it seems equally apparent that singers who recorded between 1900 and 1915, schooled in the traditions of the ‘old music’, would have certainly retained at least some of the principles of style and technique that formed their basic musical education.”

Robert Ignatius Letellier  
Cambridge  
5 September 2013

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## PREFACE

Meyerbeer was born in Berlin on 5 September 1791. He always regarded himself as a Prussian, and remained loyal to the Hohenzollern family all his life. He grew up in a period of violent upheaval, with the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars shaping the landscape of the modern world. Prussia, like all of Europe, was forced to rise to the new challenges. Under the dynamic political leadership of Barons Stein and Hardenberg it re-created itself as a vibrant modern state. The way had been prepared by the progressive King Friedrich Wilhelm II, who in the 1790s had transformed parochial Berlin into an artistic centre. Jewish salons were especially popular as meeting places for the poets, artists and musicians whom the King had attracted to his capital. The French Revolution had removed the restrictions on Jews that had confined them to commercial activities, and even in conservative Prussia they were now a major force in cultural life.

Meyerbeer's parents were wealthy and highly respected members of this Jewish community. His mother, Amalia Beer, was the daughter of the chief elder, Liebmann Meyer Wulff, whose immense fortune came from such entrepreneurial enterprises as managing the postal service between Berlin and Potsdam, running the Prussian national lottery and supplying silver to the mint. Meyerbeer's father, Jacob Herz Beer, had made his money in the sugar industry. He owned refineries in Berlin and in Gorizia in northern Italy, and was a prominent businessman; he was one of four directors appointed to manage the new Berlin Stock Exchange in 1805. Both Meyerbeer's parents were artistically inclined. His mother – who was decorated by the Prussian King for her work for the wounded in the Napoleonic Wars – ran a famous artistic and musical salon, while his father was one of the founders of Berlin's first privately-owned theatre. The Beers were also very active in the Jewish community. They established the first Reform Temple in Berlin – and one of the first in the world – in their house in the centre of the city.

Meyerbeer's family was closely knit; his three younger brothers were a source of both love and pain in his life. Wilhelm fought as a young man in the Napoleonic campaigns, and became a successful banker and outstanding amateur astronomer. Heinrich was a rather eccentric collector of valuable manuscripts (including some by Beethoven) who connected the Beers with

the Mendelssohn family through his wife Betty. The youngest brother Michael was a gifted poet and dramatist who died young, in 1833. Meyerbeer would write his famous incidental music to his brother's play *Struensee* in 1845.

As a gifted child, Jakob Meyer Beer (the original form of his name) studied under Karl Friedrich Zelter, the organizer of the Berlin Singakademie, and Johann Friedrich Reichardt, an important figure in the development of the *Singspiel*. From these teachers he absorbed a solid knowledge of the classical composers, a reverence for contrapuntal technique and an enthusiasm for stage composition. At the age of 19 he went to Darmstadt to study under the famous organist, composer and pedagogue the Abbé Georg Joseph Vogler. Carl Maria von Weber was a fellow pupil. Here Meyerbeer learned more about harmony, dramatic characterization, and the flexibility and extended palette of the orchestra. His first two German operas, written at this time, show a striking originality in the psychological depth of the orchestra in colour and subtle sonorities, and in the bold use of leading motifs, which is developed even at this stage to a dramaturgical principle.

Meyerbeer left Darmstadt in 1812. After a sojourn in Vienna, and trips to Paris and London, his interest in the Italian school took him to Italy in 1818, where for six years he immersed himself in the vibrant lyrical traditions and the compositional method that Rossini, his direct contemporary, was decisively codifying. He now styled himself professionally as Giacomo Meyerbeer. The six works Meyerbeer wrote between 1818 and 1824 with the librettists Gaetano Rossi and Felice Romani signify a period of growth: each of the operas marks a further stage in a process of assimilation and development. His handling of the voice was to be profoundly and decisively affected by the *bel canto* school.

In his last operas for Italy, especially *Margherita d'Anjou* (Milan, 1820) and *Il crociato in Egitto* (Venice, 1824), glowing melody and powerful choruses impart colour and forcefulness to rich descriptive harmony, with a flexible use of forms, both old and new.

By 1826, Meyerbeer was a successful composer. It was a decisive year for him: with both his arrival in Paris, the city of his artistic destiny, and his marriage. Meyerbeer's diaries, which he began keeping in 1812 and maintained until a few months before his death on 2 May 1864, provide a privileged insight into his personality and a fascinating record of the artistic life of Europe during these years. He regularly frequented the theatre, and attended every variety of musical performance. The record of his activities in Berlin, Paris, London and Italy forms one of the most

detailed chronicles of the artistic life we possess from any great composer, and his diaries contain records of performances ranging from recitals of Beethoven's late string quartets in Paris in the 1830s to Easter performances of Bach's Passions in Berlin. But his chief concern was always opera, and he spent his life travelling, composing, overseeing performances of his own works and attending as many as possible by his contemporaries (including Berlioz and Wagner). Meyerbeer's appointment as *Generalmusikdirektor* in Berlin during the 1840s and then as director of the Royal Court Concerts during the 50s vindicated this artistic engagement, acknowledged his great achievements and conferred on him an enviable social prestige.

After his father's death in 1825, Meyerbeer assumed his responsibilities as head of the family and married his first cousin, Minna Mosson. The marriage was happy, but shaped by the demands of the composer's itinerant career and the pressures of their personalities.

The couple lost their first two children in infancy, and this personal sorrow affected them both profoundly. Minna never felt at home in Paris, the focus of Meyerbeer's professional life. Both of them also experienced chronic ill health. For Meyerbeer, who suffered from a recurrent alimentary condition (perhaps Crohn's disease), the pressure of meeting expectations and maintaining standards after the huge success of his first two French operas made relentless demands on his personal resources, often causing panic, insomnia and nervous collapse. Nevertheless, with their daughters Blanca, Caecilie and Cornelia, the Meyerbeers formed a happy family, despite later pressures, such as the gambling debts of Blanca's aristocratic husband and Caecilie's long-term wasting illness. The youngest, Cornelia, married the artist Gustav Richter, and became a famous figure in Berlin society during the Wilhelmine years.

### *Robert le Diable*

The success of his last Italian operas brought Meyerbeer considerable fame, but for years he wrote nothing new for the theatre. In a letter to the famous bass Nicolas-Prospere Levasseur of 5 July 1822 he acknowledged the limitations of his Italian experience, and revealed the direction of his artistic thinking:

I can assure you that it would be even more glorious to have the honour of writing for the French Opéra than for all the Italian stages. (I have indeed, given my works in all the major Italian houses.) Where else, therefore, but in Paris can the vast resources be found which the French offer to an artist who wants to write truly dramatic music? Here, there is a lack of good

librettos, and I know your unbiased public welcomes all types of music, if allied to genius.

It was the end of an era in his creative life. His trip to Paris for the production of *Il crociato* was undoubtedly the most significant move of his career. He was aware that he was not yet ready to create something new in the highly-wrought French manner, and in order to prepare himself to meet the challenges of the French stage buried himself in the study of French civilization, its history, literature, graphic arts and theatre. Meyerbeer's exhaustive exploration of the *théâtre lyrique* made him an authority on the repertory of the Opéra, while his researches into the spoken theatre brought him into contact with his principal collaborator, the dramatist Augustin Eugène Scribe (1791–1861). Using French bourgeois life as his principal theme, and with a staff of co-workers, Scribe produced a long series of plays, vibrant with actuality. As a librettist who instinctively understood the needs of the stage and the psychology of his composers and audiences, he distilled the very aspirations of the age. Meyerbeer, with astute perception of the times, responded to the political, religious, social and aesthetic issues of the day. All the themes he would explore, with the help of Scribe, were topical at the time of his arrival in Paris in 1826 and through the 1830s, when the scenarios of all his major works were written or conceived. Many of these ideas would be explored cyclically in Meyerbeer's French works, which can be seen as a progressively unfolding operatic discourse of ideas about mankind and society caught up in the processes of history.

The composer established an immediate artistic affinity with Scribe, who proposed they work together on a subject based on the medieval legend of Robert le Diable (Robert the devil), father of William the Conqueror – an idea that enthused the composer. The basis of the drama was a French 13th-century romance about a childless woman who obtains a son by praying to the devil; the son is strong and wicked, and lives a lawless life, but finally repents of his misdeeds and is reconciled to the Church.

The work was originally planned as a three-act *opéra comique*, but Meyerbeer persuaded Scribe to recast the work as an intensely Romantic five-act grand opera. This entailed some rewriting of the storyline, chiefly reducing the essentially comic role of the minstrel Raimbaut. Meyerbeer signed a contract with the Opéra on 1 December 1829, and, inspired by the quality of the material, immediately began composing, making rapid progress. The plans were temporarily upset by the 1830 July Revolution, but in the following year the new director of the Opéra, Louis-Désiré Véron (1798–1867), an astute businessman and inspirational organizer,

chose *Robert le Diable* as the first big opera premiere of his tenure.

Véron contracted the élite of the French theatre for the production. The *chef du service de la scène*, Edmond Duponchel (1795–1868), shared the stage management with Scribe and Adolphe Nourrit (1802–39), the tenor who would create the title role. The scene designer was Pierre-Luc-Charles Cicéri (1782–1868), the choreographer Filippo Taglioni (1777–1871) and the conductor François-Antoine Habeneck (1781–1849), a noted exponent of Beethoven's symphonies. Added to this was a first-class ensemble of singers and dancers, and what was at the time the best opera orchestra in the world.

The dramatic music, harmony and orchestration of *Robert*, its melodramatic plot and its overwhelming stage effects, especially the famous Ballet of the Nuns in Act III, made it an overnight sensation at the premiere on 21 November 1831, and instantly confirmed Meyerbeer as the leading opera composer of his age. Meyerbeer seemed to fuse German counterpoint, Italian melody, the pomp of Spontini and unprecedented orchestral riches in a unique and overwhelming artistic blend. Frédéric Chopin, who was in the audience, observed: 'If ever magnificence was seen in the theatre, I doubt that it reached the level of splendour shown in *Robert*... It is a masterpiece... Meyerbeer has made himself immortal.'

It became one of the most popular and ubiquitous operas of the century, and in its day a social phenomenon. For Heine, Meyerbeer epitomized his epoch. Balzac depicted Meyerbeer as the ideal composer in his novel *Gambara*; for George Sand and Alexandre Dumas (*films*) he was the supreme lyric dramatist in history; the philosopher Herbert Spencer ranked him as the greatest opera composer of the century.

First among the ingredients of this success is the nature of the libretto created by Scribe. The story of the adventures of the young hero and his trials and tribulations taps into the well-springs of folktale, national heritage and beyond into those mythic elements we now call the collective unconscious. This was reinforced by Scribe's adaptation of other more recent historical trends: firstly, the Romantic concern with the past, especially the Middle Ages, and secondly, the strand of Dark Romanticism known as the Gothic, in particular the Gothic novel tradition that flourished in England from the 1790s to the 1820s, and produced hugely influential works by Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, Charles Robert Maturin and Mary Shelley. The movement was very popular in Germany and became a potent force in French literature. Authors used a historical framework to explore the experiences of the mind and imagination in dreams, fantasies and the forbidden, and perplexing aspects of human behaviour now associated with the unconscious. Then there was Sir Walter

Scott, a literary phenomenon, whose poems and novels, translated into every European language, had become a vast cultural influence. Scribe used these works both overtly in adaptation, and more subtly in his reworking of that particular type of character represented by the hero of Scott's *Waverley*: an apparently vacillating and impressionable young man struggling with changing historical and social factors, pulled in opposite directions between the allure of the glamorous but dangerous past and the more prosaic but sensible demands of the present.

The scenario of *Robert le Diable* thus functions on many levels, eliciting memories of other sources and literatures, appealing to myth, legend and history and to personal and social concerns. On one level it is the history of a soul; it unfolds a spiritual drama about sin and salvation, the search to overcome the disruption and imperfection of the unredeemed self in a saving act of reconciliation and integration. The theological dimension is very powerful. On another level it is about the attainment of the balanced personality, the issues of heredity and the demands of life lived fully in the present. It is also about making social and political choices between opposing and equally absorbing options: on the one hand party affiliation, the pursuit of corporeal pleasure, financial acquisitiveness and sexual licence; on the other, the quest for higher, spiritual and more altruistic ideals. The mix is a potent one, and the levels of appeal, both conscious and intuited, are extremely powerful.

The opera generated a mystique from the outset. Its composition was associated with the political unrest preceding the July Revolution, and the change of direction at the Académie Royale de la Musique where the dynamic Véron was to begin his memorable tenure. The sensational premiere of Meyerbeer's opera initiated one of the most extraordinary efflorescences in the history of the lyric theatre, continuing with Auber's *Gustave III, ou le bal masqué* (1833), and culminating in Halévy's *La Juive* (1835) and Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* (1836).

What made the first opera of Véron's new regime so striking was the care he lavished on the whole enterprise. *Robert le Diable* represents the fulfilment of a Romantic ideal – the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or fully integrated work of art that utilizes all the plastic and performing arts in achieving a complete and effective dramatic presentation. The librettists Scribe and Germain Delavigne, with Meyerbeer's new and in many respects revolutionary music, had been co-operating even to the last minute to achieve a fluent and effective dramatic medium of situation, words and music. Some of the most well-known pieces in the opera were conceived at a late stage – most famously the final form of the Ballet of the Nuns, in close co-operation with the choreographer Taglioni. Another late addition

was the beautiful cavatina for Isabelle, which had been composed only a few weeks before the premiere for the soprano Laure Cinti-Damoreau. The singers were among the greatest talent available: in addition to Cinti-Damoreau, a great dramatic coloratura soprano, there were the more lyrical Julie Dorus-Gras as Alice, the formidable bass Nicolas-Prosper Levasseur as Bertram, and, most famously, the tenor Adolphe Nourrit, whose musicality and dramatic instinct made him one of the great singers of the age, as Robert. He also created Masaniello (*La Muette de Portici*), Arnold (*Guillaume Tell*), Gustave III (*Gustave III, ou le bal masqué*), and two of the most difficult and prestigious parts ever written for the tenor: Eléazar (*La Juive*) and Raoul (*Les Huguenots*). The chorus and orchestra, directed admirably by Habeneck, were well able to meet the composer's imaginative demands.

*Robert le Diable* became one of the greatest successes in the history of opera. The statistics of its most significant performances are astonishing. Meyerbeer provided a list of the cities where *Robert le Diable* was produced in the first two years of its history (*Revue musicale*, 1834): 39 in France, 23 in the German-speaking lands and seven in other countries: a total of 69 different theatres. It was given 754 times in Paris until 28 August 1893 and revived there in 1911 and 1985; 260 times in Berlin (until 1906), with a revival in 2000; 241 times in Hamburg (until 1917); 111 times in Vienna (until 1921); 83 times in Milan (until 1886); 57 times in Parma (until 1882); and 54 times in London (until 1890). There were productions in every continent, from Barcelona to Odessa, and in cities including Constantinople, Oran, Cape Town, Calcutta, Mauritius, Batavia, Melbourne, Valparaiso, Buenos Aires and New York. *Robert's* huge success was also reflected in more than 160 transcriptions, arrangements, paraphrases and fantasias by, among others, Adam, Chopin, Cramer, Czerny, Diabelli, Fumagalli, Herz, Kalkbrenner, Liszt, Litolff, Musard, Offenbach, Pixis, Prudent, Raff, both Johann Strauss I and Johann Strauss II and Thalberg.

Scribe and Meyerbeer produced a work which, in the words of William J. Collins in the *International Dictionary of Opera*: 'changed the face of opera and influenced even those who would become the composer's musical adversaries'.

## Meyerbeer's Later Works

Meyerbeer's next opera five years later, *Les Huguenots*, initially evoked some disappointment in that the supernatural element that had been so effective in *Robert le Diable* was missing.

But it soon became Meyerbeer's most successful work, the very distillation of his musical experience, overwhelming in its treatment of complex historical issues, the very epitome of grand opera in its harmonic plenitude, instrumental richness, melodic lustrousness, lyrical prowess and the supremacy of the vocal parts. It became one of the most popular operas ever written, performed 1,126 times in Paris until 1936, and throughout the world.

Much of Meyerbeer's work as a dramatic artist focuses on the theme of faith and what this means in terms of the great choices in life. Indeed, this concern pervades his entire output, from his first opera *Jephtas Gelübde* (1812) to his last, the posthumous *L'Africaine* (1865). His most famous French operas constitute a tetralogy in which the issues of faith, history, society and personal choice interact with the demands of intransigent religion and politics. In *Robert le Diable* the milieu is the Christendom of the Middle Ages, and despite all doubts, the issues are resolved in positive statements of sacramental faith. In *Les Huguenots* (with its interplay of light and darkness, the public and the private) the enviable unity is shattered by dissent and partisan conflict: all the protagonists will die in this unthinking situation in which ideas are more important than people. In *Le Prophète* of 1849 (with its Breughel-like evocation of the poetry of winter and its glorious coronation), religion and politics are fatefully enmeshed, and discredited: idealism can find expression only in sacrificial love. In *L'Africaine* (with its rapturous vocalism and kaleidoscopic orchestral colours) empire, colonial expansion and personal glory assert themselves catastrophically: the only solution is the transcendence of the sacrificial self-offering of the redeeming heroine.

These concerns were understood by some of the composer's contemporaries. The famous author and critic Théophile Gautier had no doubt about the real themes of Meyerbeer's operas, and provided a serious critical response. He wrote a penetrating analysis of *Le Prophète*, placing it in an intellectual relation to Meyerbeer's other major French works.

These three operas compose an immense symbolic trilogy, filled with profound and mysterious meaning; the three principal phases of the human soul are found represented there: faith, examination and illumination. Faith corresponds to the past, examination to the present, illumination to the future. In order to be made visible, each one of these ideas has taken its necessary form: *Robert le Diable* the fairytale; *Les Huguenots* the chronicle; *Le Prophète* the pamphlet. (*Histoire de l'art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans*, Paris 1858).

These concerns were born of Meyerbeer's life and background, of his

consistent awareness of the relentless nature of anti-Semitism (which affected him throughout his career) and the fragility of social commitments. The Wagnerian animus epitomized in the pamphlet *Das Judentum in der Musik* is still maleficently active, while Nazi opprobrium further damaged Meyerbeer's standing in Germany. The great irony of Meyerbeer's life is that his work, often dismissed as meretricious and bombastic, is in fact a profound reflection on some of the most serious of life's concerns, and a powerful assertion of the freedom of the human spirit, the supreme defining nature of love. Even his second, apparently slight, *opéra-comique*, *Le Pardon de Ploërmel* (1859, also known as *Dinorah*), a composition of exquisite craftsmanship and intimate loveliness, is a parable of redemption.

In the end it is the beauty of Meyerbeer's musical inspiration and his simple but searing humanity that endure: people are more important than ideas.



## INTRODUCTION

This book presents a discography of recordings made of Meyerbeer's works from the inception of recording techniques in 1889 until the overwhelming dominance of the long playing record was established by 1955. It is a testimony to the once universal fame of the composer and the esteem in which in his works were held. During that period over 2000 musicians (at least 1065 of them singers) recorded arias and ensembles from all six of the French operas of Meyerbeer's maturity, as well as selections from other works and a variety of arrangements for band and other instruments. As there are more than 150 different recorded arias, the whole of this recorded legacy makes Meyerbeer one of the most popular classical composers of any age.

Just about every singer of any standing recorded something from the Meyerbeer operas, and many of the legendary names of this Golden Age of Song were devoted to his compositions. The compilation of this discography has been a learning process in the history of opera, the nature and state of lyric recording, and a lesson in the history of song and vocal technique, with attention so often focusing on the astonishingly vibrant world of operatic recording in Russia—both in the Imperial and Soviet eras (with artists both famous and provincial, like Eugenia Bronskaya, Maria Yakovlevna Budkevich, Dmitri Bukhtoyarov, Alexander Davidov, A. Derzhavin, Zara Dolukhanova., Ignacy Dygas, Vasili Gagayenko, Ivan Gritchenko, Ivan Ivanzov, Oskar Kamionsky, Vladimir Kastorsky, Natalia Kazantseva, Lev Klementiev, Andrei Labinsky, Alexander Matveyev, Maria Mikhailova, Yuri Modestov, Antonina Nezdanova, Rosa Olitzka, Debora Pantofel-Nechetskaya, Sigismund Pilinsky, Sergei Preobrazhensky, Alexander Rosanoff, Vladimir Rosing, Galina Sakharova, Konstantin Serebryakov, Basil Sevastianov, Nikolai Shevelev, Lev Sibiriyakov, Dimitri Smirnov, Ivan Yershov, David Yuzhin, Kapiton Zaporozhets, Lau Zinovyev).

The statistics for recordings of arias from Meyerbeer's operas, between 1889 and 1955 are striking by any standard:

### **From *Robert le Diable***

- 8 singers recorded Alice's Romance ("Va, dit-elle")
- 8 singers Robert's Sicilienne ("O fortune à ton caprice")
- 49 singers Bertram's Scene et Évocation ("Nonnes qui reposez")
- 37 singers Isabelle's Cavatina ("Robert, toi que j'aime")

**From *Les Huguenots***

- 20 singers recorded Raoul's entrance aria ("Sous le beau ciel")
- 107 singers Raoul's romance ("Plus blanche")
- 63 singers the Chanson Huguenote ("Piff, paff")
- 78 singers the Chanson du page ("Nobles seigneurs")
- 52 singers the Air de la reine ("O beau pays")
- 19 singers the Queen's cabaletta ("A ce mot seule")
- 25 singers the various parts of the duet for Valentine and Marcel ("Dans la nuit...Tu m'as compris")
- 17 singers the Conjuración ("Des troubles renaissants")
- 30 singers the Bénédiction des poignards ("Gloire au grand Dieu")
- 102 singers the various parts of the Grand Duet ("O ciel...Le danger presse...Tu l'as dit...Plus d'amour")
- 50 singers the famous *Andante amoroso* from the Grand Duet ("Tu l'as dit")

**From *Le Prophète***

- 29 singers recorded the Pastorale ("Pour Berthe")
- 57 singers the Arioso de Fidès ("Ah, mon fils")
- 30 singers the Hymne triomphale ("Roi du ciel")
- 22 singers the Complainte de la mendicante ("Donnez, donnez")
- 41 orchestras the famous Coronation March (*Marche du sacre*)
- 14 singers the various parts of the Scène et Cavatine de Fidès ("Prêtres de Baal...O toi qui m'abandonne...Comme un'éclair").

**From *L'Étoile du Nord***

- 5 singers recorded the Prière et Barcarolle ("Veille sur eux...Vaisseau que la flot balance")
- 11 singers the Romance de Pierre ("O jours heureux")
- 6 singers the Grand air de Catherine ("La, la. La air chéri")

**From *Dinorah***

- 77 singers recorded the Air de l'ombre ("Ombre légère")
- 13 singers the Chant du chasseur ("En chasse")
- 65 singers the Romance d'Hoël ("Ah mon remords te venge")

**From *L'Africaine***

- 12 singers recorded the Romance d'Inès ("Adieu, mon beau rivage")
- 34 singers the Air du sommeil ("Sur mes genoux")
- 75 singers the Air de Nélusko ("Fille des rois")
- 19 singers Nélusko's recitative ("Holà matelots")

- 68 singers the Ballade de Nélusko (“Adamastor”)
- 204 singers Vasco da Gama’s Grand Air (“O paradis”)
- 8 singers Vasco’s cabaletta (“Conduisez-moi”)
- 23 singers the Cavatine de Nélusko (“L’ avoir tant adorée”)
- 5 singers the Invocation du Grand Brahmine (“Brahma! Vichnou!”)
- 30 singers various parts of the love duet (“O transport...O ma Sélika”)
- 23 singers the various parts of the Grand Scene du mancenillier.

Among the hundreds of singers covered, some recorded Meyerbeer arias several times. The highest scorers, with between 10 and 40 recordings, were:

- Agustorello Affre (t) 24
- Carlo Albani (t) 10
- Paul Aumonier (b) 39
- Fernand Baër (b) 22
- Michael Bohnen (bs) 15
- Léon Campagnola (t) 19
- Florencio Constantino (t) 13
- Alberto De Bassini (bs-b) 12
- Eleonora De Cisneros (ms) 12
- Adam Didur (bs) 11
- Gaston Dubois (t) 17
- Elise Elizza (s) 13
- Léon Escalaïs (t) 14
- René Fournets (t) 13
- Franz Gauthier (t) 18
- André Gresse (bs) 13
- Frieda Hempel (s) 11
- Karl Jörn (t) 12
- Barbara Kemp (s) 10
- Juan Luria (b) 13
- José Mardones (bs) 20
- Margarethe Matzenauer (ms and s) 10
- Ottilie Metzger (c) 19
- Maria Mikhailova (s) 15
- Juste Nivette (bs) 24
- Jean Noté (b) 16
- Sigrid Onegin (c) 15
- Paul Payan (b) 20
- Gertrud Runge (s and ms) 19

Lev Sibiriyakov (bs) 13  
 Leo Slezak (t) 39  
 Jacques Urlus (t) 11  
 César Vezzani (t) 10

Paul Aumonier and Leo Slezak with 39 records each, are in a class of their own, followed by Agustarello Affre, Fernand Baër, José Mardones and Juste Nivette, all with 20 plus.

The second league, with 7 to 9 recordings each, is made up by:

Pasquale Amato (b) 8  
 Marius Chambon (bs) 9  
 Gaston Dulière (bs-b) 8  
 Marcel Journet (bs) 8  
 Selma Kurz (s) 8  
 Lise Landouzy (s) 9  
 Giuseppe La Puma (b) 8  
 Giacomo Lauri-Volpi (t) 9  
 Antoinette Laute-Brun (s) 9  
 Antonina Nezhdanova (s) 8  
 Margarethe Ober (c) 8  
 John O'Sullivan (t) 8  
 Aurelie Révy (s) 8  
 Albert Vaguet (t) 7  
 Francisco Vignas (t) 7

All these recordings, despite variable and uneven technical quality, constitute precious testimonies of the vocal artistry of a bygone age, with links to rich lyrical traditions going far back far into the nineteenth century. They present an overview of the artists, outstanding and otherwise, working in opera during a period of 60 years—both before and after the political and social cataclysm of the First World War—and are witness to the development of the science of recording, the history of music-making, and the story of song itself.

## I. General Structure

The discography consists of four sections: a chronological list of opera selections, choruses, orchestras (using original scoring), and transcriptions (arrangements for specific instruments and bands), an alphabetical list of individual artists and ensembles.

## II. Entries

### A. Order of Entries

Entries within each section are listed in alphabetical order by the last name of the performing artist. Solo selections are listed first, followed by duets (in alphabetical order by last name of the second artist), then trios, quartets, etc. For example, recordings with Leo Slezak are found in the following order:

Slezak, Leo	- solo selections
Slezak, Leo / Bland, Elsa	- duets with Bland
Slezak, Leo / Elizza, Elise	- duets with Elizza
Slezak, Leo / Sedlmair, Sophie	- duet with Sedlmair
Slezak, Leo / Mayr / Preuss / <i>et al.</i>	- septet

Since each recording is listed once *and only once* in the discography, those in which more than one artist participates will be found under only *one* of the artists' names. Each recording is entered only once for two reasons: 1) additions to and corrections of information need only to be made once; 2) a total count of individual recordings can easily be made. The rule used to determine under which name the selection is listed is as follows:

Recordings of ensembles are entered under the name of the artist with the greatest number of solo recordings in this discography; appropriate *see* or *see also* references are placed at the name entries of the other artists.

For example, the septet "Will meinem guten Recht vertrauen" with Slezak, Mayr, Preuss, *et al.* is entered under Slezak (28 solo recordings); Preuss (1 solo recording) has a *see also* reference to Slezak; Mayr (no solo recordings) has a *see* reference to Slezak. Although the rule may seem arbitrary, it serves to keep ensemble recordings grouped together under fewer artists' names, rather than scattered throughout the discography under a variety of artists' names.

## B. Format of Entries

Each entry for the 78 rpm era has the following format:

- (1) **Name of artist** (voice type)
- (2) Label & catalog number
- (3) matrix
- (4) date
- (5) place
- (6) description
- (7) opera & selection
- (8) alternate form of issue 1
- (8) alternate form of issue 2
- etc.

1) Artists are entered alphabetically by last name and in bold print followed by voice category (soprano, tenor, bass, etc.), abbreviated and in parentheses.

2) The label name (usually the name of the company issuing the recording) is indented under the artist name; label names are listed in alphabetical order. Each label name is followed by a catalog number (the number used by dealers to order a record). The label-number combination represents the **original** form in which the recording was published.

Sometimes a superscript is attached to a catalog number in the discography; this indicates that more than one matrix, or "take," was issued under the same catalog number. Superscripts are infrequently found next to Victor numbers, occasionally found next to Pathé numbers, and often found next to Edison Diamond Disc numbers. Except in rare instances, the superscripts do *not* appear on the actual labels.

3) The matrix number of the recording master (the master cylinder number in the case of Pathé recordings through ca 1925) always appears within parentheses to distinguish it from any other nearby number. Matrix numbers are often the only way to tell that two identical looking discs are really different recordings or that two different looking discs are really identical.

4) Following the matrix number is the date the recording master was cut in a studio. A recording date in the discography usually consists of a day, a month and a year; where the day is not known, only the month and year appears; if the month is not known, only the year appears; if all that is

known is a catalog release date, then the year is preceded by *ca* (circa) to indicate an approximate date of recording.

5) The place code (if known) is an abbreviation of the city in which the recording was made; sometimes, when a company is known to have recorded in several different cities and it is unclear which, a country code is used instead. See section III below for a list of place code abbreviations.

6) Physical description of the record:

a) if a cylinder:

- i) whether 2-minute, 3-minute or 4-minute type;
- ii) whether wax, Blue Amberol (BA), or celluloid;
- iii) playing speed of recording in rpm (if known).

b) if a disc:

- i) diameter of disc in inches and centimeters;
- ii) color (or colors) of label (if known);
- iii) playing speed of recording in rpm (if known);
- iv) proper stylus diameter (if known).

Recording speeds marked with an asterisk (\*) have been pitched to match the published score.

7) A one-letter code is used to indicate the opera (A = *Africaine*, C = *Crociato in Egitto*, D = *Dinorah*, E = *Etoile du Nord*, F = *Feldlager in Schlesien*, H = *Huguenots*, P = *Prophète*, R = *Robert le Diable*). While it is true that the original title of *Dinorah* is *Le Pardon de Ploërmel*, it is more commonly known by the name of its heroine, which provides a handy single-letter code that does not duplicate any of the other opera title codes. Following the code is the title of the selection as it appears on the record label. The language in which the selection is sung can usually be determined from the language of the title. If there is any question as to language, it is indicated in parentheses following the title of the selection.

8) Alternate forms of issue (AFOI) are recordings that share the same matrix as the **original**.

These appear in alphabetical order indented under the original label and number with a minimum amount of information. A matrix may share the same label name as the original but with a different catalog number

(issued in a new number series, issued as a double-sided record if the original was single-sided, or issued in a different coupling). A matrix may appear on a label altogether different than the original: reissued in a budget series (example: Gramophone/Zonophone), repressed by an affiliated manufacturer (example: Odeon/Fonotipia), or released for a different market (example: Deutsche Grammophon (domestic) and Polydor (export)).

Any differences between the original and alternate forms of issue that affect the way a recording plays are noted in the "description" column.

Example 1: A single Pathé master cylinder was sometimes used to produce wax cylinders, etched-label center-start discs, and paper-label edge-start discs, all different in appearance, playing speed and sound quality.

Example 2: If a matrix broke or just wore out, a manufacturer sometimes made a new matrix by re-recording ("dubbing") a copy of the original. Victor identifies such rerecordings in the blank shellac area between the last groove and label as "S/8," sometimes referred to as "S over 8." Any alternate form of issue that has been re-recorded is identified in the discography as "rr."

Example 3: Certain companies, most notably IRCC, CRS and HRS, specialized in re-recording scarce, long out-of-print records in addition to contracting pressings from original matrices. These are identified as "POM" (pressed off master) or "rr."

### III. Abbreviations Used

#### Operas

A = *Africaine*

C = *Crociato in Egitto*

D = *Dinorah (Pardon de Ploërmel)*

E = *Étoile du Nord*

F = *Feldlager in Schlesien*

H = *Huguenots*

P = *Prophète*

R = *Robert le Diable*