

Experiencing Gigli with Quality Audio

Experiencing Gigli with Quality Audio:

Exquisitely Beautiful Singing

By

Paul James

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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This book first published 2021

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-7273-0

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7273-7

DEDICATED TO NICK BROOKE

There are many people who come in and out of our lives. Yet time marks out the really rare, those who truly care and share. Nick, my faithful friend, steadfast and true, who shared the warp and weave of my life journey. Together from childhood to parenthood. As good a friend as someone could wish for. Conversations with Nick were down to earth, easy, substantial, and joyous. They often contained a dash of humour which Nick dispensed without any pretence, like when he mimed milking a cow to tell the stuffy waiter in France that he wanted some milk for his coffee! Like all great people, he never lost his inner child.

Nick always showed up. He was there in body and spirit, and with thoughtful words. His richly full life reshaped mine. He was there to share our joys, our disappointments, trials, tribulations, and thrills. Many of our achievements in life get recast. You got that grade, job, qualification, or material possession, yet did they really matter as much as we thought they did? Long after the facts of our lives fade, the resonances of our character leave an impression. The traces may be faint yet they are there. In the end, I think the Beatles were right when they said “the love you take is equal to the love you make.” I dedicate this book to Nick in honour of our deep friendship. He can be remembered as a person of rare virtue, a thoroughly good friend through thick and thin.

Paul James

February 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book could not have been completed without the contributions of many people. Without inspiration from Steve Garland to advance my own hi-fi system I would not have imagined that a book like this one could have been written. Thanks also to all those that were involved with the Killer Dac group. This group provided invaluable alternative ideas and knowledge to much of the conventional thinking in hi-fi.

I have gratitude for Antonio Maria Lancuba of Golden Voice Studios for his expert knowledge, insights, and demonstrations of Bel Canto Opera singing. Antonio not only helped put Gigli's singing in perspective but also helped me to understand Gigli's journey in becoming a Bel Canto master.

Thanks to Graham Rankin for his generous hospitality, giving me the opportunity to listen to his meticulously restored EMG gramophone, and for the information he shared about the development of EMG. Many of the fine recordings he played for me are "bucket list" moments. The work he has done restoring EMG machines and assisting people from around the world is deeply inspiring.

Thanks also to those that have given me invaluable feedback on my draft text, including the musicians Chris Quaid and Shawan Rice.

My book is all the better for the meticulous and thoughtful editing of Graham Clarke of Brighter Corners Editing Services.

A debt is owed to the audio pioneers such as the EMG developers Michael Ginn, David Phillips, Harry Seymour, Percy Wilson, Balfour and Gordon Davey, E. F. Jordan and other staff at Goodmans Industries who

contributed to the development of their loudspeakers, the founder of Shindo Labs Ken Shindo, Art Dudley for his inspired writing on audio, and also Paul Baker of Falls Audio for his tireless efforts in completing numerous audio experiments and audio designs over many years.

Thanks to Noam Chomsky for his insights on language and communication, and for shining a light on the need for decent behaviour. His quote, “Either you repeat the same conventional doctrines everybody is saying, or else you say something true, and it will sound like it’s from Neptune,” speaks to me.

I am also am grateful to my friends and family for enriching my world and for their encouragement.

WHO IS BENIAMINO GIGLI?

‘Gigli was the first tenor to span the modern history of recorded sound, from acoustic recordings cut in 1918 to stereophonic tapes made in the early 1950s’.¹ ‘In the 1920s Gigli followed in the footsteps of Enrico Caruso² as the tenor mainstay of the Italian opera repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera (Met) in New York’.³ ‘He returned to Europe in the 1930s after a failed negotiation with the Met over his payment’.⁴ ‘Here, Gigli secured a government contract to perform all over Italy’⁵, and was free to make his reputation where he wished. He began to make popular films. His embrace of the technology of mass entertainment was total – films sold records, as did radio. At one point, Gigli’s record company needed six people to handle his discs alone.⁶

‘His popularity worldwide was boundless. In a sense, Gigli invented the notion of “crossover” through his enthusiasm for performing and recording everything from grand opera to popular Neapolitan songs’.⁷ Gigli travelled widely both as a member of opera companies and as a solo artist, enjoying nothing more than visiting a new place and quickly having an audience eat out of his hand. Gigli gave stadium concerts and was one of the founders of opera in the open air at the Baths of Caracalla, the Roman amphitheatre used by the Three Tenors.⁸

Gigli’s appeal was his remarkable voice. ‘A bootmaker’s son from the provincial town of Recanati in the Marche region of northeastern Italy, Gigli had an irrepressible urge to sing. As soon as he was able to climb the steps of the tower of Recanati Cathedral, Gigli would regale the townsfolk with

his singing.’⁹ Joining the cathedral choir brought discipline and provided a thorough musical grounding for the young man, whose public debut involved impersonating a soprano in a student operetta at a theatre in Macerata.

A fortuitous encounter with an opera-mad cook encouraged Gigli to take his chances with a precarious career in music and prompted a move to Rome. After months of living in conditions of penury straight out of Puccini’s *La Bohème*, Gigli eventually found a sympathetic teacher with the twin requirements of belief in his natural talent and a willingness to give him lessons for no payment. Later, he secured a scholarship to the prestigious Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome, although the admissions board had to bend the rules to admit a student with little in the way of musical skill, save an outstanding and “utterly glorious lyric tenor voice.” “At last, we’ve found the tenor” was the cry of the jury at the Parma vocal competition of 1914 – a kind of “singing Olympics.”

Audiences in Genoa, Palermo, Naples, Verona, and Rome revelled in Gigli’s talent. His reputation soon reached abroad and his first foreign tour was in Spain, and he also caused a run on the box office in Buenos Aires. He rose to true international prominence, and his popularity with audiences was immediate!

The Metropolitan in New York offering him a ten-week contract. Soon, it was his good fortune to be able to step into the shoes of Enrico Caruso, whose career as the Met’s top star came to an abrupt end when his health failed. Gigli’s Met years secured his reputation. Through recordings, a worldwide audience could enjoy the voice which one American critic described as possessing “peculiar warmth and mellowness in the middle register, and notable for the beauty of its timbre, remarkably elastic, exquisite in *mezza voce*, luscious in full-blooded emission.”¹⁰

As the techniques of the recording industry developed, Gigli began to record complete operas on 78s. For many people, his 1938 version of *La Bohème* – recorded at La Scala, Milan with Licia Albanese as Mimì – was the first opera recording they ever acquired. Among historic recordings of *La Bohème* it remains unsurpassed.

Gigli's voice remained in remarkably good shape right up until his last public appearance in 1955. For the last eight years of his career he set himself a punishing schedule to allow as many people as possible to hear and remember him.

When Gigli died on November 30, 1957, he was given the biggest funeral ever accorded to an Italian singer.¹¹ Succeeding generations continue to buy and enjoy his rereleased recordings. His recorded legacy offers a vivid and tangible link to the golden age of singing.

Gigli's sound production was beautiful. There is no forcing the air through the muscles of the throat, which is mostly what we get today in both male and female singers. There is beautiful phrasing and wonderful use of colour in the voice, down to the level of vowels changing colour. To hear Gigli's prism of tone colours in "La Donna È Mobile," where other tenors just sing notes, or his heart-melting phrases in Nadir's aria from Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers* is to hear vocal magic. He was known for his use of *messa di voce*, which is something like singing *mezzoforte*, and at the same time not – the voice softens, doesn't squeeze (in the throat or use any muscles in the tongue), and still projects.

It is widely known that Gigli could sing an opera and then a post-performance recital consisting of twenty or more songs and arias, and do so day after day without any sign of vocal wear or fatigue until the final years of his career. This is an indication of the relaxation of his voice production, and the ease with which he sang. His singing required much less exertion

than most male vocalists. “Gigli was one of those rare singers who could not sing off pitch.”¹² His is a lost art mundane today.¹³ His innate musicality and communicative eloquence were unique and thrilling. His career lasted for forty-one years, during which he recorded more than four hundred records, starred in nearly twenty films, sung in sixty-two roles, and gave 2,249 opera performances. Beniamino Gigli also has a star on the famous Walk of Fame in Hollywood.

Divine Beauty

When Beniamino Gigli sings we experience Keats’s revelation: “A thing of beauty is a joy forever:/ Its loveliness increases; it will never/ Pass into nothingness.”¹⁴ Gigli’s smooth sweet effervescent tones “catch our heart off guard and blow it open.”¹⁵ The startling, almost unearthly beauty of his voice is indispensable to the spell it creates. It is Gigli, it is magic. When he sang, many would spontaneously rise from their seats with joy, more than a few with tears in their eyes and rolling down their face. His haunting voice blesses us.

Gigli gave his heart with warmth and fervour and his own interpretation of songs. The abiding beauty of his songs touches the soul as well as the heart. As Nigel Douglas writes, every phrase Gigli sang was delivered as if it was of gigantic importance to him.¹⁶ Gigli shares feelings that express our primal nature. They set in flight the deep inner self like Walt Whitman summoning the “barbaric yawp.”¹⁷

Gigli reveals the joys, pains, despair, and longing intertwined in human life and brings them near to us, so they somehow become (experienced as) our own. In the process, he taps into what is essential about ourselves, our yearnings, our aspirations, and our ethos. He shows that our imperfections

are not merely defects, and our frailties also paint us with colourful uniqueness.

Beniamino Gigli draws the listener into the opera world. “The mundane world of outer reality that surrounds us is dissolved and we enter a domain that we realize has always been within us.”¹⁸ The beauty of his singing carries us away. “Our eyes open, new horizons appear, and the spell gradually deepens at both conscious and unconscious levels”.¹⁹ His “pure round tones”, which are “luminously mellow”, “vibrant, and sweet”, are marvellous.²⁰ He has a golden voice, “light and full and rich”, which is beguiling to the listeners’ ears. Comments on his recordings include “soft and beautiful,” “real fire,” “the gold just flows from his throat,” “extraordinarily inspired,” “inimitable,” and “exquisite.” Herman Klein from *Gramophone* wrote that that Gigli’s 1931 recording of “Che Gelida Manina” from *La Bohème* was “indisputably flawless.”²¹

“Gigli was unlike other opera singers who did little to vary dynamics and seldom shaded their tones, using the same colour to express both happiness and sadness. Gigli had many sonorities and two basic dynamic levels – loud and soft. Gigli perfected *chiaroscuro* like no other singer, which he achieved by contrasting loud with soft singing – a *chiaroscuro* of dynamics.”²² But he also contrasted “open, closed, and covered tones” – “a *chiaroscuro* of timbre”.²³ If you hear Gigli sing a song such as “La Donna È Mobile” you can hear a prism of tone colours where other tenors just sing notes. Or his rendition of Nadir’s aria “Mi Par D’Udir Ancora” from Bizet’s *The Pearl Fishers*, which is heart melting, as is “The Dream” from Massenet’s *Manon* or his 1932 recording of the “Chanson Hindoue” from *Sadko*. The emotional intensity and expressiveness of Gigli’s singing are remarkable.

Gigli's song invigorates like glorious summer sunshine after an eternity of winter. His sun-filled voice is uniquely liquid; it flows over the music with the uninhibited naturalness of speech. His singing is sublimely effortless and pure, even when he is performing demanding songs. His ability to perform practically the whole program again for charity after a main concert without tiring showed he was a high master of Bel Canto singing. Gigli could never sing an ugly note, and his singing was consistently beautiful. He could produce a lightning-fast crescendo without brutality, roughness, or hesitation.²⁴

Gigli's extraordinary technique and vocal understanding permitted him to make frequent forays into repertoire normally reserved for spinto and dramatic tenors. Andrea Chénier was Gigli's favourite role. Another in which he was unsurpassed was that of Des Grieux in *Manon Lescaut*. Both roles are supposedly for "heavier" voices, not lyric tenors.²⁵

The human need for beauty is a natural and positive impulse. The sensuous and thoughtful beauty of Gigli's singing is enjoyable for its own sake. Even in its most joyous and sparkling moments.. 'there is an undertow of melancholy that speaks to us of many things that are remote from transient sensual delight. It becomes a mirror of all that is within us – the joys, sorrows, passions, yearnings, anguish, ardour, and sadness that comprise the totality of subjective human experience'.²⁶

Gigli's songs could be a balm, a form of sound healing going straight to the heart and soul. In these word-heavy times, people are exhausted by polarization, twenty-four-seven news, and general noise. A gifted interpreter of songs, Gigli provides cues that reach and move listeners emotionally. Gigli's songs teach us to drop into a deeper intelligence, to listen to where the music wants to go. The quiver in the voice that betrays a broken heart can also massage the soul with its vibrato.

When a correct technique of tone production is used, the voice not only acquires the power of vibrancy over a wide range of notes but is also capable of extreme agility.

We are used to hearing loud singing tones, which are largely noise, where an ability to colour the vowels and create an atmosphere and mood is surrendered to a boisterous and aggressive style. Big singing tones like Gigli's which is well resonated have a different impact, '...for with the big tone the scale of intensity is always smooth and even throughout the entire range of voice'.²⁷ "Singing of this kind is marked by a notable absence of struggle and effort."²⁸

"When the singing technique is noisy the scale and intensity become unbalanced. Most of the volume is concentrated in the upper-middle part of the voice range, and often attains a degree of power that can only be matched by the unpleasantness of the quality. The highest tones of the voice together with a large segment of the lower portion of the range will be weak and entirely out of proportion with the rest of the voice."²⁹

With an abiding enjoyment of singing, Gigli loved his audience and was always willing to sing for all kinds of charities. This is why he was renowned throughout the world as "the Singer of the People." Memories of a concert he gave long ago are etched in the audience's memories:

Throughout the afternoon and evening they came winding down from the hills, hundreds and then thousands of people from the surrounding countryside, and when Gigli had at last finished singing to them, they stood outside his hotel calling for him "as if he were a king." He went out onto the balcony. It was a sight none of us will ever forget. The people stood so close together that you could only see their raised faces – thousands of them – white in the moonlight. Then he flung out his arms to them and began to sing again, his voice as beautiful, perfect, and seemingly as untired as ever.³⁰

Those in attendance did not need any musical training to know that they were listening to a truly gifted singer. It is hard sum up Gigli better than as the embodiment of the ethos of Walt Whitman: “I celebrate myself, and sing myself,/ And what I assume you shall assume,/ For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.”³¹

In contemporary life we have become preoccupied with the outside world, and have allowed the interior life to shrink. We are accustomed to keeping things at surface level. The deeper questions about who we are and what we are here for visit us less and less. Gigli’s songs encapsulate the power of music “...to shine a light into places nothing else can reach.” There are good reasons for people to be grateful for Gigli’s singing. He is one of the finest opera singers in the history of recorded music. He is still a supremely beautiful-sounding tenor and distinctive character among singers. It is easy to listen to Gigli’s wonderfully natural, unforced singing hour upon hour. In the musical enchantment provided by Gigli we receive a gift of lasting goodness.

Notes

¹ Graeme Kay, ‘Beniamino Gigli - A Life in Words and Music’.

https://www.naxos.com/mainsite/blurbs_reviews.asp?item_code=8.558148-51&catNum=558148&filetype=About%20this%20Recording&language=English

² Caruso was the most admired Italian operatic tenor of the early twentieth century and one of the first musicians to document his voice on recordings.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Enrico-Caruso>

³ Kay, *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Ibid..

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Samurai, Gigli's Distinctive Vocal Technique,

<https://rec.music.opera.narkive.com/pfvzOEKv/gigli-s-distinctive-vocal-technique>

¹³ Steven, "Classical Music and Musicians."

<https://classicalmusicandmusicians.com/2018/04/11/beniamino-gigli>.

¹⁴ John Keats, "Endymion," Book I,

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/endymion-book-i-thing-beauty-joy-ever>.

¹⁵ Seamus Heaney, "Postscript," <https://poems.com/poem/postscript>.

¹⁶ Nigel Douglas, "Beniamino Gigli in Song," <http://www.wyastone.co.uk/nrl/pvoce/7874c.html>.

¹⁷ Walt Whitman, "The Walt Whitman Archive," <https://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/poems/27>.

¹⁸ Colin Bain. Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Leonardo Ciampa, *Gigli* (Worcester, MA: AMW Press, 2019), 60.

²² Stefan, "Hitler's Tenor Beniamino Gigli His Public Life; His Secret Life; His Singing", <https://www.belcantosociety.org/hitlers-tenor/>

²³ Stefan, Ibid

²⁴ Colin Bain. "The aesthetics of Beniamino Gigli's singing,"

<https://www.operavivra.com/articles/aesthetics-beniamino-giglis-singing/>

²⁵ "Beniamino Gigli", Last FM. <https://www.last.fm/music/Beniamino+Gigli/+wiki>

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Mumi. "Singing & Vocalism OT", <https://www.neogaf.com/threads/singing-vocalism-ot.506253/>

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Nigel Douglas, “Beniamino Gigli in Song,” *Gramophone* (May 1990), <http://www.wyastone.co.uk/nrl/pvoce/7874c.html>.

³¹ Whitman, “The Walt Whitman Archive.”

OPERA SINGING TERMINOLOGY

There are many special terms which apply to opera singing. A summary of the main terms¹ used in this book follow.

Term	Description
Bel canto – Italian	Beautiful singing, a style of singing characterized by a brilliant vocal display and purity of tone.
Chest voice	“Chest voice” – commonly used to refer to those tone qualities which respond to high levels of intensity in the lower pitch ranges. Functionally, these qualities result from the parallel positioning of the vocal folds by the cricothyroid and arytenoid muscles in a “thick” adjustment.
Colouring the voice	Making adjustments in the tonal texture of vocalized sound to reflect emotional responses to the music or text. Tonal colouration is achieved by subtle variations in the balance of registration, and by adjustments made for resonance. Terms such as “rich,” “dark,” and “ringing” are all verbal representations of tonal colouring.
Chiaro	The chiaro timbre of the voice is often referred to in terms of light, clarity, and energy, by descriptors such as squillo, ring, brilliance, or vitality. The scuro timbre of the voice is often referred to in terms of texture, shape, and dimension, by descriptors such as velvet, depth, and roundness.
To force	The use of excessive energy to compensate for an absence of muscular equilibrium within the vocal tract. Half voice – phonation at low levels of intensity, used artistically to reduce the fatigue factor of the voice (“save the voice”). In Italian, “mezza voce.”

Term	Description
Head voice	Tone qualities produced through the coordinated activity of both register mechanisms, the chest register and the falsetto, but with the falsetto strongly dominant. Called “head voice” due to the sensations of vibration in the head cavities.
Legato – Italian	“Connected,” the connection between two or more tones in a musical phrase. A true legato reflects a constant, precise resonance adjustment for all tones and is inseparable from good singing.
Line – Legato	Tonal flow that gives a musical phrase the impression of possessing a linear dimension.
Nasal tone	A vocalized sound whose thin, “twangy” tonal characteristics are the result of throat constriction.
Natural quality	Property of a tone, apart from pitch and intensity, determined by its harmonic structure, by temperament and anatomical structure, and revealed only when the mechanism is free of constricting tensions with all its constituent parts finely “tuned” and well-coordinated both physically and conceptually.
Open throat	An adjustment of the laryngo-and oropharynges that is free of constricting tensions.
Passaggio – Italian	“Passageway,” an early frame of reference used to indicate that portion of the tonal range where it is necessary to cross from the chest voice to the head voice smoothly and evenly. The smooth and easy negotiation of the passaggio without loss of range, resonance, or flexibility is the hallmark of technical mastery.
Pressure	In singing, pressure is applied to the vibrating vocal folds by escaping breath.

Term	Description
To Push – during phonation	To expend energy that is improperly channeled or improperly absorbed by the vocal mechanism. Register change – an abrupt transition from one register balance to another that causes a break in the tonal flow. The danger in using a divided registration is that it can split the mechanism, causing a vocal breakdown. Those who possess a well-developed vocal technique have at their disposal the option, rather than the necessity, of using the two mechanisms either separately or together.
Resonance	A spontaneous reinforcement and amplification of tonal vibrations which occur whenever a cavity is tuned to the natural frequency of the pitch being sounded.
Rich tone	A sound whose harmonic spectrum is enriched by the proper reinforcement of both higher and lower partials, or overtones.
Scurio	The scurio timbre of the voice is often referred to in terms of texture, shape, and dimension by descriptors such as velvet, depth, and roundness.
Spinto	A tenor voice of powerful dramatic quality.
Timbre	The waveform or complex harmonic structure of a sound as expressed in quality; the “colour” of the sound.
Too far back	A term used to describe vocal qualities produced when the throat is constricted.

Note

¹ John Curran Carpenter, *The Vocal Technique of the Verdi Baritone*.

https://honors.libraries.psu.edu/files/final_submissions/2343. 4-7

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Why Listen to Beniamino Gigli?

With so much entertainment easily available, with access to vast stores of digital music, the songs of a long-deceased opera singer may seem unimportant, maybe even irrelevant. Any need for Beniamino Gigli's music may appear illogical, similar to Simone Weil's idea of workers needing poetry more than bread. Yet no one sings like Gigli. Magical is the right word for it. One anonymous listener writes the following: "I am flying with this voice." Another listener says: "what a voice, this is sublime." His songs are exquisitely beautiful. Engaged listeners are rewarded with a sumptuous, sweet, and effortless timbre. No wonder many of his audiences wanted his songs to never end. With a storm of applause, they vigorously and gleefully requested encore after encore. The audience would not be satisfied until Gigli returned repeatedly to the stage.

Gigli's voice demonstrated qualities that were unique to the singers of the Bel Canto generation. His singing had impressive agility and versatility, an enormous range, and great expressiveness. The intimacy of his singing is akin to slipping into a pool of water. It is like a sacred blessing, and his songs are vastly different to highly processed show tunes or pop opera designed for fame and fortune. Other opera singers have a voice that is equal or more powerful than Gigli's, yet the beauty and feeling he conveys are

peerless. It is astonishing that when Gigli sings one may feel like heaven and the devout might perceive Mary descending on a cloud! “The voice we hear is one of unexampled beauty, pure and round in tone, luminous on every note, mellow and vibrant, sweet and beguiling to the ear, and suffused with a softness – the prized morbidezza of the Italian school – that extends even to its forte and fortissimo passages. There are no register breaks, no impediment to the absolute homogeneity of the voice over a scale of two octaves. The high, the middle, and the low notes are all equally well sung. The voice is uniquely liquid – it flows over the music with the uninhibited naturalness of speech”.¹

With Beniamino Gigli there is a lifetime of focus on one thing, singing with expressive beauty and achieving musical intimacy. To be truly intimate is to take off our masks and let down our guard, to set aside our pretences and share what is shaping us and directing our lives. In a bewildering and sometimes confusing world, Beniamino’s songs sung from the heart can be incredibly refreshing. The expressive beauty of Gigli’s songs reveals the strengths and weaknesses, faults, failings, flaws, defects, and talents of the people the opera songs represent. In song, Gigli always wanted to share the feelings of the person it was about, rather than just words and sounds. He was also committed to lifelong learning, and strived to be the best singer he could.

Some critics have assumed that Gigli’s singing was driven by vanity, thinking he was “hamming it up” on stage, being overly melodramatic to get more praise, and more requests for encores. While Gigli was greatly concerned about pleasing audiences his focus was to sing well and reveal the inner life of the opera character he was playing. Gigli’s song from Handel’s “Care Selve” is tenderly thoughtful, and its poignancy lingers on the listener’s ear. You do not need to know Italian to feel the ache of the

journey of searching for one's lover. There is nothing clumsy or ham-fisted about this performance – it is rendered with precision. Gigli found his own way to sing. For Gigli, singing was about seeking out the soul of the music, to imprint your own soul upon it, and to send it out, through your voice, into the souls of other people.² As he said to other aspiring singers, one should strive not for “more voice” than someone else, not for “bigger” or “higher” tones, but for that “pure, rich roundness of tone” which alone is worthy of expressing the soul of music.³

While Gigli's songs were not always technically perfect, they were always beautiful and moving, echoing his generous nature and delight in singing. He was for good reason known and loved as the “people's singer.” Going straight to the heart and soul, Gigli's songs throw a musical light on what moves us, inspires us, and drives us, what we are running towards, what we are running from, what silent self-destructive enemies lie within us, and what wild and wonderful dreams we hold in our hearts. The subtle nuances of feeling that Gigli's imparts to his songs can enrich the listener. Gigli is long gone, yet his songs can still speak to us, move us, and enrich us.

Cherish Gigli's Songs

Allowing more people to discover and rediscover Beniamino Gigli is a worthwhile goal. Gigli's songs provide more than hedonism, a pleasurable experience. His songs can be cherished. To cherish something is to value it in a different way. The action of cherishing Gigli's music will also highlight many aspects of listening and reproducing music that may not have been noticed as they have become mainstream and ubiquitous. As Peter Qvortrup of Audio Note identifies, there is a widespread ignorance of the history of audio and audio reproduction with the general population and audiophiles

as well. And not being informed by history can lead to audio reproduction that is inferior to what has been achieved in the past. This is the opposite of what most people would think, who would expect audio reproduction to have advanced. As will be explored in this book, while audio reproduction has advanced in some ways, in others it has not.

I will also discuss how listening is taken for granted by some people who are hearing rather than listening. When listening does occur it may not necessarily be attentive, but may be a superficial form of listening. Trends in technology shape the production of, access to, and reproduction of music. The digital lifestyle has shaped the experience of music for many people. Changes in the recording process have changed how vocals sound, and in particular their naturalness, authenticity, and beauty.

Like Excalibur, a sword way beyond a regular version, the finest, most exceptional and outstanding audio reproduction of music can be transformative. The highest quality reproduction changes both the meaning and the impact of experiencing music. Being able to reproduce beautiful singing really well is also a tribute to a consummate artist like Gigli.

Music that may have been beautiful and wondrous does not necessarily sound that way when recorded and played back. Defacing and damaging a picture or book we cherish undermine its meaning and significance, and our relationship with it. A rough and raw facsimile, a rudimentary reproduction of what Gigli's singing could sound like it, may be good enough for many. Yet, the desire for the finest possible reproduction of his voice can be understood as an act of cherishing his singing in the same way one cherishes a special book, painting, or picture. A poor audio reproduction may be likened to defacing a beautiful and special book.

I have come to realize that the long and demanding training and personal challenges involved in being an opera singer like Gigli parallels the

obsessive-compulsive habits needed to realize the very finest audio reproduction. Unlike a book or painting that is just there (assuming it does not need to be restored), a recording is never just what it is, but is always transformed in how it is played back. So not only is there great value in people experiencing Beniamino Gigli's singing, there is also something precious in devoted acts of achieving wonderful audio reproduction. These two passions perfectly piece together Gigli's special singing and audio reproduction.

A singing voice such as Gigli's "raises the bar" of what it is possible to experience through audio reproduction, as Gigli has more subtly, more emotional nuances, more inflection in his voice, and more beauty than many people have likely experienced. This is held back not only by difficulties in audio reproduction, but also because people are unlikely to have heard a singer with Gigli's outstanding capabilities.

An analogy could be made of an amazing diamond that shines so when it is cut right. Likewise, the magnificence of Gigli's singing can only be revealed fully on a system that is capable of outstanding audio reproduction. At the same time, Gigli and his singing throw trends in music reproduction and listening that we may not have noticed into sharp contrast. These are important as they have shaped the reproduction of the human voice, and not always for the better. Sometimes, the most important learning is unlearning, and going backwards may sometimes be a move forwards. The first gramophones were made 137 years ago, with the technology used in the EMT gramophone (as discussed in chapter four) being in modern terms archaic, and almost wickedly ancient. Yet, it renders the human voice in a way that the majority of contemporary audio systems do not. There is a design synergy and naturalness of vocal reproduction that the EMT provides that easily eclipses contemporary designs.

It is a great tribute to Gigli to be able to listen to his songs when they are reproduced well. As well as sharing knowledge about Gigli, this book explores the quest for improved audio reproduction, and for singing in particular. As the well-established field of music therapy demonstrates, music can offer more than entertainment. Gigli's legacy of recorded music can continue to make an important contribution to human wellbeing. His music can be a blessing, his songs giving us a new environment nourished by human qualities and experiences shaped in song.

Sounding Beautiful

There is a vast difference between commonplace understandings of audio reproduction and what is involved in reproducing music that sounds beautiful. As Neil Young said of the digital recording revolution: "We will look back on it and go, 'Wow that was the digital age. I wonder what the music really sounded like.' We got so carried away that we never really recorded it. We just made digital records out of it. Edison would not have approved."⁴

"More people are listening to music than ever in recorded history. Depending on what survey is used, people could be listening to about eighteen hours of music per week. Music has become a ubiquitous companion for many people, especially adolescents. The great presence of music in the lives of so many people affects their way of life profoundly – how they feel, how they perceive, how they think, and how they behave. Music plays a role in the lives of most people across the world".⁵

Enjoying music seems easy, with "plug and play" through a phone, notepad, or some other device. Easy-to-use, affordable, and portable devices shape our musical experience. Yet, there are many interrelated factors that affect how music is experienced. The same song can be reproduced so

differently that it can be unnoticeable, forgettable, boot shaking, or spine-tingling and intimate. To understand the outcomes achieved by the audio reproduction of music and our ability to fully experience a consummate singer such as Gigli, we need to consider what is affecting our experience of music. The major factors involved are considered below.

Natural Reproduction

Today, there is an idea that you can be a successful singer without much effort. Underlying this view is an approach to singing that demands little of both the singer and the audience. It is true that the human voice hasn't been reproduced naturally for a long time. "Digital pitch correction is the rule."⁶ Pitch correction is the technology that can make the tone-deaf sing in key, and make skilled singers perform more consistently. Pitch-correction autotune software can correct the pitch of singers who miss the exact note they try to hit. Since 1997, recording engineers have used digital pitch-correction plugins to fix pitchy vocal takes. Pitch correction has been used on nearly every chart-topping album for more than twenty years, and is now an industry standard that is applied to all tracks you hear on the radio.

"What is the problem with pitch correction when electronic modification of music has existed for many years in many forms (effects pedals, modular synthesis, etc.) within multiple genres including country, classic rock, and blues?"⁷ "Autotuning might be seen as a natural extension of the artistic process. While initially marketed as correction, autotuning has been used extensively across entire songs rather than just for a few imperfections. Lots of artists may be insecure about their voices, and use autotuning as a kind of protective shield. It removes the need for extensive practice as well as the challenge of nailing a vocal. Rather than going through intensive coaching and talent training, artists can and do use pitch correction".⁸

As Tom Moon comments:

There is a certain quality that you get from Neil Young that no one else in the world has, and the minute that you put him on the grid and align him, as happens with autotune, you are in a different business. Suddenly, something that is essential about Neil Young, something about his “Neil Young-ness,” is taken away.⁹

A Glut of Music

The world is awash with music. There are vast numbers of performers, and the consumer can access a great range of recordings online. Yet, as Bob Dylan said:

The world don't need any more songs ... They've got enough. They've got way too many. As a matter of fact, if nobody wrote any songs from this day on, the world ain't gonna suffer for it. Nobody cares. There are enough songs for people to listen to, if they want to listen to songs. For every man, woman and child on earth, they could be sent, probably, each of them, a hundred records, and never be repeated. There are enough songs. Unless someone's gonna come along with a pure heart and has something to say. That is a different story.¹⁰

Anyone can write songs now, anyone can record them too, and that contributes to a glut of music. All an artist needs is a laptop and a microphone. It is now so easy to hear music. Digital downloads – and piracy – mean that the amount of music we can access at any time has increased by many orders of magnitude. Now, with streaming services, people can