

Marcel Journet

The Complete Solo Gramophone Recordings
1909-1933

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LINER NOTES

Being accepted as a voice student at the almighty Paris Conservatory—from day one—was no bed of roses, and graduating from it was fraught with the fiercest possible competition as well as with musical *and* political hurdles and pitfalls. There is so little known about the Paris Conservatory, and therefore so much misinformation and general mystique abound in what literature we have, that this seems to be a reasonable venue to set some matters straight.

During the period of the 1880s through the 1890s, the Paris Conservatory had nine voice teachers and admitted, after a preliminary examination, some sixty to eighty voice students each year. These students had to have as a prerequisite a *baccalauréat* from a lycée. They then entered the Conservatory, facing minimally a rigorous two-year study of solfeggio, singing and coaching in roles traditionally associated with the two Parisian national theaters, the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique. Each year all students had to enter three contests, the terrifying *concours*, where a jury judged them. Each student had to perform a selection of the jury's choosing for three categories "singing," "opéra" and "opéra comique" and could choose a selection of his or her preference. Only twenty-four annual prizes were awarded, eight prizes for each of the three categories, four for male and four for female vocalists: first prize, second prize, first accessit and second accessit. Therefore, only twenty-four (sometimes fewer, sometimes slightly more) out of a hundred or more students could, by this game plan, win prizes, and only those who won prizes could consider themselves as "graduates." Those students who had attended—for whatever length of time—but who had won no prizes were *strictly* forbidden even to claim attendance at the Conservatory.

Very few students ever won prizes after the first year of study. These beginners, after all, were competing with second-, third- and fourth-year students; the jury understood this and would vote, if the student showed any promise at all, "thumbs up" for further study. Many students, however—who, according to the jury, showed little or no promise—were actively urged to leave after the first or second year. Many others dropped out for health, financial or other reasons. Lucien Muratore and his young "secret" bride, Marguerite Bériza (students were contractually forbidden to be married to each other) entered the Conservatory in the very late 1890s. After one year Muratore could no longer tolerate the rigorous and exhausting regimentation and walked out voluntarily; his wife—although quite miserable—stuck it out until her rather belated graduation in 1902 or 1903.

Virtually every reference work states that Marcel Journet studied at the Paris Conservatory under Seghettini. Kutsch and Riemens, in *A Concise Biographical Dictionary of Singers* (1969) added "Obin" to "Seghettini." According to the official Conservatory annals, *Le Conservatoire National de Musique et de la Déclamation* by Pierre Constant (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1900), no one by the name of Seghettini ever taught singing (or any other subject) at that institute. Obin, however, did teach the course in "opéra" until at least 1887. Constant lists every graduate; Journet's name is nowhere to be found.

Marcel Journet was born at Grasse (Alpes Maritimes), approximately twenty miles west of Nice, on 25 July 1867. From the information we have, it would appear that Journet was probably admitted to the Paris Conservatory, left the institution and continued to study privately with someone named Seghettini, a beginning almost parallel to that of Lucien Muratore. Without the *imprimatur* of the Paris Conservatory or the sponsorship of a very powerful personage, a debutant singer had only the slimmest of chances of being engaged by either the Paris Opéra or Opéra-Comique. In fact, Journet sang stellar roles at Brussels's La Monnaie, London's Covent Garden and New York's Metropolitan before he ever debuted at the Paris Opéra. When he did, he was then forty-one years old, with a seventeen-year career behind him.

Since Journet's Gramophone recordings were all made in Europe, these notes will attempt to trace his European career. His North and South American career, sporadically from 1900 to 1926, will be dealt with in future volumes devoted to his Victor recordings.

Journet's operatic beginnings are obscure, as those of so many singers who made debuts in the French provinces. According to some sources, he made his debut in Béziers in 1891; according to other sources, in Montpellier in 1893. In any event, in 1894 he made his debut at La Monnaie, a theater then considered virtually the equal of the two Parisian houses and, as such, proved to be a launching pad for many singers's international careers. He sang there until 1899 in the standard repertory of *Samson et Dalila*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *Sigurd*, *Fidelio*, *Lohengrin*, *Faust*, and *L'Africaine*. On 31 October 1898 he appeared as Fasolt in the Monnaie premiere of *Das Rheingold*.

Max de Schauensee in his perceptive notes to a Rococo LP re-issue, tells us that the Metropolitan administration, throughout Journet's tenure at the house from the 1900 to the 1907 season, assigned him primarily to what one might call the "secondary" bass roles, the leading bass roles being given to his senior rivals, Edouard de Reszke and Pol Plançon. By the end of the 1907 season, when both de Reszke and Plançon had retired, Chaliapin was engaged and, as the newest rage, inherited the majority of these leading bass roles. Crestfallen, Journet diplomatically left the house owing to "ill health".

Journet's early years at Covent Garden, beginning in the spring of 1897 until 1907 and then 1909, were similarly frustrating. While assigned a much greater variety of roles in London than in New York, Journet still had to share many major roles with both de Reszke and Plançon and, from 1905, with Vanni Marcoux. During Journet's first year there he shared *Les Huguenots* with de Reszke and *Tannhäuser* with Plançon; in 1898 as well as in 1903–04 he shared *Faust* with Plançon and in 1909 with Marcoux; in 1899 Frère Laurent in *Roméo et Juliette* with both de Reszke and Plançon and in 1901–02 with Plançon; in 1905 Sparafucile in *Rigoletto* with Marcoux; and in 1907 *La Bohème* with Marcoux. Journet's repertory at Covent Garden during these years consisted of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1903), *La Bohème* (1899–1900, 1902–06, 1907), *Carmen* (1903 shared with Scotti), *Don Giovanni* (1903–06, 1909), *Eugene Onegin* (1906), *Faust* (1898, 1903–04, 1907, 1909), *La Gioconda* (1907), *Henry VIII* (1898), *Les Huguenots* (1897, 1901, 1905, 1909), F. d'Erlanger's *Inez Mendo* (1897), *Loreley* (1907), *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1903, 1907), *Manon* (1903), *Messaline* (1899), *La Navarraise* (1904), *Philémon et Baucis* (1898, 1904), *Rigoletto* (1901–07), *Roméo et Juliette* (1899, 1901–04, 1906), and *Tannhäuser* (1897). It was not until the seasons of 1927 and 1928 that Journet returned, now a full-fledged artist in his own right, performing, without competition, in 1927 in *Carmen* and in 1928 in *Carmen* and *Louise*.

Journet's debut at the Paris Opéra took place on 2 October 1908 as the King in *Lohengrin*, and he appeared every season at that house until 1914. He returned in 1919, 1921–23, and 1926–30. His debut at the Opéra, however, did not free him of serious rivals. As at the Metropolitan, two major basses reigned at the Paris Opéra: Jean-Francois Delmas and André Gresse. In 1909 Journet sang Hunding to Delmas's Wotan in *Die Walküre*; it was not until 1910 that he sang his first Wotan. Again in 1909 he sang Fafner to Gresse's Fasolt in the Opéra premiere of *Das Rheingold*. In 1911, he sang Pogner to Delmas's Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger* and did not sing Sachs until 1927. In 1914 at the premiere of *Parsifal*, Journet sang Klingsor, Gresse Titirel and Delmas Gurnemanz. Journet only sang the major roles when he returned after World War I, in 1919, and when both Delmas and Gresse had retired.

During his Paris years, Journet performed at the *grands concerts*: at the Concerts du Conservatoire, in 1909 in Bach's *Saint John Passion* with David Devriès and Charlotte Mellot-Joubert; in 1911 in Handel's *Israel in Egypt* with Yvonne Gall and Ketty Lapeyrette; and in 1912 in Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ* with Auguez de Montalant under Messenger.

It was at Monte Carlo, however, that Journet reigned supreme from 1914 to 1920. He debuted there on 20 January 1914 as Gurnemanz in the Monte Carlo premiere of *Parsifal* with Félia Litvinne, Charles Rousselière and Alfred Maguenat, and thereafter sang a wide range of roles: in 1915 *La Vivandière* with Marie Delna and Maguenat, *Aida* with Litvinne, Caruso and Maguenat, *Rigoletto* with Alice Zeppilli and Caruso, *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Graziella Pareto and Caruso, and *Samson et Dalila*; in 1916 *Il Matrimonio Segreto*, *La Bohème* and the world premiere of Dupuis's *La Passion*; in 1917 *Ernani*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Rigoletto* and Rameau's *Platée*; in 1918 *Rigoletto*, *Manon*, Saint-Saëns's *Étienne Marcel*, é Gunsbourg's *Manole*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and Balfe's *King Richard in Palestine*; in 1919 *Rigoletto*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La Bohème*, Marchetti's *Ruy Blas* as well as, unexpectedly, the baritone roles of Tonio in *I Pagliacci* and Scarpia in *Tosca*. The first *Tosca* of that season, by the way, was sung by Battistini; Journet sang the second and third performances. He repeated both

baritone roles there in 1920 as well as *Manon*, *Thaïs*, *La Bohème*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *Don Giovanni*, *Rigoletto*, *Samson et Dalila* and the world premiere of Gunsbourg's *Satan* (20 March). In November 1919 the Monte Carlo Opera traveled to and appeared at the Teatro Real, Madrid, in Gunsbourg's *Le Vieil Aigle* with Madeleine Bugg, one of the many Gunsbourg operas performed during his directorship of the Monte Carlo Opera. This Madrid performance was rounded out by Act V of *Faust*, also with Bugg.

It was, however, at Milan's La Scala that Journet was unconditionally accepted as first bass. He made his debut there on 22 February 1917 in *Lucrezia Borgia* with Ester Mazzoleni, Alice Gentle and Alessandro Bonci. It was not until 1922, presumably under the patronage of Arturo Toscanini, that he sang Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger*, with revivals in 1925 and 1928. In 1924 he sang five performances of *Louise* and most importantly created Simon Mago in Boito's *Nerone* on 15 November 1924 with Rosa Raisa, Luisa Bertana, Aureliano Pertile, Carlo Galeffi/ Benvenuto Franci and Ezio Pinza. He repeated his role in the revivals of that opera in 1926 and again in 1927 with Bianca Scacciati and Antonin Trantoul, all under Toscanini. In 1925 he sang Louise with Gilda Dalla Rizza, *Pelléas et Mélisande* (as Golaud) with Fanny Hedy, *Faust* with Yvonne Gall and Trantoul, all under Toscanini; in 1926 *Carmen* (as Escamillo) with Giuseppina Zinetti and Trantoul, under Santini; *Khovanshchina* (as Dositeo), more performances of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, under Toscanini; in 1927 *Faust* with Edith Mason and Trantoul, under Toscanini; and finally in 1928 his last performances there of *Die Meistersinger* with Mafalda Favero, Pertile and Armand Crabbé.

It has been difficult to document Journet's career in other important European opera houses. It is known that during the mid- or late-1920s Journet at least performed both Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger* and Méphistophélès in *Faust* at the Budapest Opera.

Back at the Paris Opéra in his last seasons, in 1928, he sang Wotan in *Siegfried*, Hagen in *Die Götterdämmerung*, the Paris Opéra debut of Rabaud's *Mârouf* with Marcelle Denya and Georges Thill, and created Silvio Lazzari's *Le Tour de Feu* with Hedy and Thill, under Ruhlmann; and on 8 May 1930 he created Brunel's *La Tentation de St. Antoine* with Marisa Ferrer, Lapeyrette and Paul Franz, also under Ruhlmann.

After 1930, Journet's last season at the Paris Opéra, his career seems to have wound down. He may actually have gone into retirement. He did however continue to make occasional visits to the Gramophone studios where he recorded three sides in 1931 and two sides in 1933.

At the turn of the century there was a plethora of great basses. By the end of World War I, the great basses such as Edouard de Reszke and Pol Plançon had died, Delmas and Gresse essentially retired, and Marcoux had changed to other repertory and other roles. The new generation of basses, Ezio Pinza, Tancredi Pasero, André Pernet, were debutants during the 1920s still honing their craft. It was only after World War I that Journet became the venerable first bass in Europe's major opera houses.

Having heard a number of Journet's early Victor recordings, I have never considered myself among his admirers. It was, therefore, a revelation to hear his European recordings of the 1920s and early 1930s. Journet's voice, unlike any other voice I know, aged like a great wine. It is truly a unique, and therefore thrilling, experience to hear an artist who after thirty intensive years of career has preserved his voice virtually intact and who can then use this voice as an instrument of expression. While some listeners may find hearing Hans Sachs sung in French or Italian somewhat disconcerting, for me there is no more sympathetic and melancholy Sachs on record; there is no more desperately crazed Athanaël on record. His two recordings from Boito's *Nerone*—that magnificent and ignored masterpiece—are stunning. Even the musically undistinguished Luce songs, among his last recordings, are transfigured.

Although biographical evidence is lacking, I believe that Journet, sometime during World War I, restudied the voice. His voice prior to the War was one essentially of two registers: his low voice that of a bass and his middle voice that of a baritone. The upper third of his range was virtually non-existent: covered, unfocused, often shouted. After the War, however, the voice was completely integrated from bottom to top, the upper third (or fourth) no longer shouted but placed. It becomes understandable why at Monte Carlo in 1919 he first essayed such high baritone roles as Tonio in *I Pagliacci* and Scarpia in *Tosca*. And I now can fully understand Max de Schauensee who, having heard Journet during the 1920s, wrote that Journet's voice "... sparkled like a great red jewel."

Footnote. Concerning the unattested Balfe opera, *King Richard in Palestine*, mounted at Monte Carlo in 1918: the librettist of this work was listed as A. Matthison. Matthison wrote only one libretto for Balfe, *The Knight of the Leopard*, left unfinished by Balfe on his death, completed by Michael Costa and performed at Drury Lane in 1874 as *Il*

Talismano. It is a mystery why the Monte Carlo administration chose to mount an obscure work of Balfe (who as composer was utterly unknown to French audiences) and to change the title of the work a third time.

Alan Kelly, in his awe-inspiring research work on the Gramophone Co., states that the Gramophone recording books list only takes-1 of CK1486 (*Nerone: Ecco il magico specchio*) and CK1776 (*Nerone: Gloria al tuo Dio*) as having been published. The only takes, however, that appear to be extant on published copies are CK1486-3 and CK1776-2. Kelly also states that there was a 16 December 1924 recording of *Die Meistersinger: Monologo di Sachs, Act II*, matrix CK1814-2, assigned the single-sided number 2-052276 but never published. No copies of this recording have thus far surfaced.

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TRACK LISTING

CD 1 (79:11)

Paris, Black label

1. **Les sapins** (Dupont) 4:23
5 June 1909; (01053v) 032157
2. LA JOLIE FILLE DE PERTH: **Air de Ralph ("Quand la flamme de l'amour")**
(Bizet) 3:57
7 June 1909; (01063v) 032158
3. DIE WALKÜRE: **Les adieux de Wotan {Leb' wohl}** (Wagner) 7:36
7 June 1909; (01064v/01066v) 032159/60
4. ROMÉO ET JULIETTE: **Dieu, qui fis l'homme** (Gounod) 4:22
with Marthe Bakkers, soprano, and Antonio Rocca, tenor
7 June 1909; (01065v) 034075
5. DON GIOVANNI: **Air de Leporello {Madamina, il catalogo...Nella bionda}**
(Mozart) 6:47
11 June & 26 November 1909; (14930u/01255v) 4-032944/032130
6. LA FAVORITE: **Anathème de Balthazar** (Donizetti) 3:56
with Louis Dupouy, baritone
11 June 1909; (01091v) 034076
7. LE NOZZE DI FIGARO: **A mes désirs rebelles {Vedrò, mentr'io}** (Mozart)
3:00
15 June 1909; (14944u) 032945
8. PHILÉMON ET BAUCIS: **Que les songes** (Gounod) 3:36
15 June 1909; (01097v) 032132
9. Symphonie Légendaire: **Prière ("Dans le cimetière aux murs blancs")** (Godard)
3:55
15 June 1909; (01099v) 032161
10. **Les boeufs** (Dupont) 3:21
26 November 1909; (15458u) 4-32008
11. LOHENGRIN: **Prière {Mein Herr und Gott}** (Wagner) 3:50
26 November 1909; (01254v) 032129
12. LA DAMNATION DE FAUST: **Esprit des flammes** (Berlioz) 2:25
28 February 1910; (155291/2u) 4-32080

Paris, Red label

13. ASCANIO: **Enfants, je ne vous en veux pas** (Saint-Saëns) 3:11
15 May 1922; (BS383-2) 7-32072
14. MONNA VANNA: **Dis-la vite** (Février) 3:01
16 May 1922; (BS384-2) 7-32074
15. DIE WALKÜRE: **Les adieux de Wotan {Leb' wohl}** (Wagner) 6:27
16 May 1922; (BS386-3/BS387-1) 7-32075/6

Milan, Red label

16. NERONE: **Nell'antro ov'io m'ascondo tutto vedrò. . . Ecco il magico specchio**
(Boito) 4:45
16 May 1924; (CK 1486-3) DB733
17. NERONE: Gloria al tuo Dio ["Pensa: **i Reami**"] (Boito) 2:52
4 December 1924; (Ck-1776-2) DB819
18. DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG: **Follia! Follia!. . .La luccioletta {Wahn! Wahn! überall Wahn!}** (Wagner) 6:38
16 December 1924; (Ck 1813-3/Ck1812-2) DB827

All tracks accompanied by orchestra

Languages: All selections are sung in French, except for Tracks 16-18 which are sung in Italian

CD 2 (78:49)

- Paris, Red label**
1. CARMEN: **Je suis Escamillo** (Bizet) 3:28
with Fernand Ansseau, tenor
11 October 1927; (CTR3177-1) DB1098
 2. **Le père la victoire** (Ganne) 2:21
11 October 1927; (BTR3179-1) DA930
 3. **Marche Lorraine** (Ganne) 2:56
11 October 1927; (BTR3180-1) DA930
 4. DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG: **Monologue de Hans Sachs {Was duftet doch der Flieder}** (Wagner) 5:23
26 October 1927; (BTR3289-2/BTR3290-2) DA951
 5. THAÏS: **La paix soit avec vous** (Massenet) 3:38
7 March 1928; (CK2768-2) DB1196
 6. THAÏS: **Honte! Horreur!** (Massenet) 3:58
7 March 1928; (CK2769-1) DB1196
 7. THAÏS: **Va, mendiant . . . De ton amour** (Massenet) 6:06
with Michel Cozette, baritone
7 March 1928; (CK2770-2/CK2771-2) DB1169
 8. THAÏS: **Baigne d'eau tes mains** (Massenet) 2:56
with Fanny Heldy, soprano
7 November; (BTR3345-1) DA940
 9. DIE WALKÜRE: **Les adieux de Wotan {Leb' wohl}** (Wagner) 14:22
13 March 1928; (CK2790-2/CK2791-2/CK2792-2 /CK2793-1) DB1156/7
 10. FAUST: **Mais ce Dieu. . . Ici je suis** (Gounod) 8:54
with Fernand Ansseau, tenor
27 September 1929; (CS4271-2/CS4270-2) DB1364
 11. FAUST: **Alerte, alerte!** (Gounod) 2:52
with Fernand Ansseau, tenor, and Fanny Heldy, soprano
26 February 1930; (CF2995-2) DB1609
 12. **Vos yeux** (Luce) 4:07
21 May 1930; (CF3274-2) DB1452
 13. **Fin du rêve** (Luce) 4:23
21 May 1930; (CF3275-2) DB1452
 14. DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG: **Rêve, rêve. . .Un elfe a tout fait {Wahn, Wahn, überall Wahn}** (Wagner) 5:26
10 June 1931; (OG838-2/OG839-2) DA1229
 15. **O salutaris** (Luce) 3:25
11 May 1933; (OPG743-1) DA1329
 16. **Ceux qui pieusement sont morts pour la patrie** (Letorey) 3:34
11 May 1933; (OPG744-1) DA1329

All tracks accompanied by orchestra except Tracks 12-13 with piano, Track 15 with violin and harmonium, Track 16 with harp and harmonium
Languages: All selections are sung in French, except for Track 15 which is sung in Latin

Producers: Scott Kessler and Ward Marston
Audio Conservation: Ward Marston