

Adelina Patti *and* *Victor Maurel*

The Complete Adelina Patti and Victor Maurel

LINER NOTES

ADELINA PATTI

“The Queen of Song”

In the second half of the 19th century Adelina Patti was the most celebrated soprano in the world. During a long career her supremacy was successively - though not successfully - challenged by a parade of other divas, among them Ilma de Murska, Pauline Lucca, Christine Nilsson and Etelka Gerster, all illustrious artists but scarcely remembered today because their careers predated the era of the phonograph. Patti outlasted them all, and continued to sing long enough to leave a legacy of recordings; as a result her art can be enjoyed nearly a century later, and through her records she continues to set standards.

Born in 1843, she made her debut at the age of eight at Tripler's Hall, New York, singing Eckert's 'Echo Song' and 'I am a Bayadere'. Her opera career began eight years later at the Academy of Music as Lucia, and lasted through a long series of farewells until a final Rosina in *Barbiere* in 1907 at Jean de Reszke's private theatre in Paris. Her last public appearance was in 1914 at the age of 71 at a concert at the Royal Albert Hall, London, when she sang 'Voi che sapete' in aid of war charities. She died at her home in Wales in 1919.

Her reign rivaled that of another monarch of the day, Queen Victoria, not only in length but in breadth. Audiences flocked to see and hear her, from St. Petersburg across to San Francisco and down to Buenos Aires. Crowned heads, Alexander II of Russia, Napoleon III, Franz Josef of Austria, Wilhelm I of Prussia and Edward VII, vied with each other for a little of the diva's condescension. Internationally famous authors eulogized her: the Russian Leo Tolstoy, the Irish Oscar Wilde, the American Henry James and the French Theophile Gautier. She earned encomiums from composers like Rossini, Verdi, Berlioz, Saint-Saens, Gounod, Tchaikovsky and Wolf. Critics renowned for their severity, including Henry Choremly, Eduard Hanslick and George Bernard Shaw, were unstinting in her praises. Even other prima donnas, members of a breed not noted for generosity to rivals, acknowledged her supremacy: "There is only one Niagara, and there is only one Patti" declared Jenny Lind. Lilli Lehmann, Melba, Eames, Alda and Tetrzzini all bowed before her. On one occasion, backstage at the Albert Hall, Tetrzzini did so literally, sinking to her knees in adulation.

Early photographs show that in her youth she was petite and exceedingly comely. Her name became a by-word for the highest artistic achievement; so remarkable was the spontaneity of her singing and the singular beauty of her voice that terms like 'bel canto' and 'coloratura' were first generally used to describe her singing. Although hers was not a big voice, in her palmy days her range extended to F-sharp in alt. Her skill was not the result of hours of solfeggio and artful fabrication; she was born into a family of singers and learned to sing as she had learned to walk and talk, simply imitating what was going on around her. At the age of seven, it is said, amid vocal mayhem at home she first secured her family's undivided attention when she climbed onto a table and silenced them by singing Norma's 'Casta diva' - even then she had a sure idea of her own worth.

In the course of her career she earned more than had any singer before her and very possibly more than any since - not excepting even Pavarotti, bearing in mind devaluation and inflation. Once, on one of her many American tours, when she was chided for earning more in one night than did the President in an entire year, she made the obvious rejoinder - "Well, let him sing!"

Her business acumen was hardly less remarkable than her singing. In 1883 The New York Herald described the scene in which the impresario Colonel Mapleson was endeavoring to coax an extra performance from her - to be paid for, of course. He went down on bended knees, kissing her hand, calling her "my dear child" - although she was forty. "He has, you know," she once said of the Colonel while fluttering her eyelashes, "quite a supplicating face and it is not easy to be firm with a man of such suavity of manner." But being firm was second-nature to her. Her contract stipulated that she be paid \$5000 a performance in gold, no later than twelve hours before curtain time! Such an amount was then mind-boggling and set a record unbroken for three-quarters of a century.

Mapleson recalls in his memoirs an occasion when the returns did not justify her fee. In Boston on the morning of a performance of Traviata, her manager, Giovanni Franchi, came to collect her usual stipend; however, Mapleson had only \$4000. Franchi indignantly swept it aside declaring the contract broken, and departed to inform the diva. Nevertheless, in a while he was back, shaking his head.

I cannot understand how it is you get on so well with Madame! You are a marvelous man, and a fortunate one, too. Give me the 4000 and she will be at the theatre in good time ready and dressed, with the exception only of the shoes. Let her have the balance when the money comes in from the public, then she will put the shoes on and make her entrance.

By the time the performance began, the box-office having taken another \$800, Mapleson sent it to Patti. "I thought having received 4800," he states, "she might have been induced to complete her toilette." Franchi returned beaming - Patti had one shoe on! "Send her the remaining 200, and she will put on the other," he assured Mapleson. Ultimately she did - but not, of course, until she had been paid in full. Then the curtain rose and Violetta [Patti], wreathed in smiles, tripped out to greet her guests.

In her day Patti might have been the equivalent of Madonna today. The repertory she sang was new; the oldest role she undertook was Zerlina in Don Giovanni, and when she first sang it the opera was only as old as is today the last great popular opera, Turandot. Other roles she sang included Amina, Rosina, Elvira in Bellini's Puritani, Linda, Gilda, Meyerbeer's Dinorah, Maria in Donizetti's Figlia del Reggimento, Semiramide, Lakme and Gounod's Mirella. As the years passed and her voice matured and became fuller in the middle and lower range, she added Margherita in Gounod's Faust and Giulietta in Romeo e Giulietta, Elvira in Verdi's Ernani, Giovanna d'Arco and Aida, Valentina in Meyerbeer's Ugonotti and Selika in Africana. She even ventured Carmen, a praiseworthy attempt but, alas, misguided; even a great admirer, her biographer Herman Klein, rated her more kitten than cat!

When, at last, in 1905 she agreed to make recordings, she declined to go down to City Road, then the London headquarters of the Gramophone and Typewriter Company, so the recording apparatus and personnel had to travel to "Craig-y-Nos," her Welsh home. There she was able, when she was of a mind, to record some of her time-honoured songs and arias, tactfully accompanied by the ever-obliging Landon Ronald, who was always ready to transpose into whatever key the great lady and nature could agree upon. He later recalled what happened after she insisted on her first record being played back so she could hear her own voice:

When the little trumpet gave forth the beautiful tones, she went into ecstasies! She threw kisses into the trumpet and kept on saying, "Ah! Mon Dieu! Maintenant je comprends pourquoi je suis Patti! Oh oui! Quelle voix! Quelle artiste! Je comprends tout! [Ah! Goodness me! Now I understand why I am Patti! Oh yes! What a voice! What an artist! I understand everything!] Her enthusiasm was so naïve and genuine that the fact that she was praising her own voice seemed to us all to be right and proper.

Patti's records preserve only the "beaux restes" of her voice, as Klein delicately puts it; by this time much of her vocal brilliance was gone, her command of more ambitious ornamentation a thing of the past. Her voice bears a resemblance to the smile of the Cheshire cat; it has not quite disappeared and her tone is still beautiful, if no longer

young sounding. It is the details of her singing, its finesse that remain. She is still capable of a seemingly infinite variety of vocal colouring, and her voice is still alive to every rhythmic subtlety.

Her technique she acquired when she was young: the flawless legato; the different weights of tone in portamento according to the width of the interval and duration of the notes; the turns and mordents always executed limpidly and in perfect proportions; the trill, whether major or minor, free of any suggestion of mechanical contrivance - indeed, her recording of the opening measures of the Jewel Song from Faust remains, after the best part of a century, peerless. We can agree with Hugo Wolf when he writes of her Vienna farewell: "It is the fastidious taste of her singing... the agility and refinement in the execution of fioritura, [that] excite admiration now as before."

Her recording of "Casta diva", although she did not sing Norma on stage, is a link in a chain leading back directly to Bellini. She studied it with Maurice Strakosch, accompanist to Giuditta Pasta, who created Norma. The embellishments she employs in the second verse are almost certainly those of Pasta. From Strakosch too she learned "Batti, batti," and Pasta had sung Zerlina in London only twenty-five years after Mozart's death. Patti often sang Zerlina, and it is more than probably therefore that her choice of a fast tempo in the concluding 6/8 section is stylish, not just an elderly diva's caprice, especially since she is hardly able to manage at that speed.

Perhaps best of all her operatic titles, from another role she undertook many times, is her interpretation of Amina's "Ah non credea" from Sonnambula. It is a perfect example of what Garcia calls the "canto di maniera" - singing which eschews showy effects and prefers instead a subtle variety of graces and rubato. Usually anyone singing this aria has us biting our nails, waiting for her to get to the fireworks in the cabaletta, "Ah non giunge". Patti, however, concentrates our attention upon the aria, causing us to realize what a wealth of fascinating detail exists in it.

Like so many opera singers in her day Patti was a famous singer of songs. As she herself says, "Some have pooh-poohed the idea of the difficulty of... a simple melody. But it is more difficult to sing... because of its demands upon the development of the voice." Her song records afford an opportunity of hearing precisely what she means. In "Kathleen Mavourneen", for example, her art demonstrates it to perfection, lines like "it may be for ye-a-rs [how exquisite is her old-fashioned pronunciation], it may be for ever", working an infinite effect upon the listener... Even the hard-hearted cannot but be moved, notwithstanding how meretricious the music may be, Noel Coward once remarked, "strange how potent cheap music can be", but he never could have heard Patti's records. Had he done so, he would have realized it is her potency, not that of the music, that is so affecting.

She dared record Arditì's "Il bacio" [in the key of D-flat], although it was not issued in her lifetime; the song remained one of her favorite concert numbers throughout her later years. For all its shortcomings, gasps for breath, and collapse in the last measures, much of the fioritura is still executed with her customary fluency; there is in it more than a hint of the élan vital that sustained her art for so long. The last words may be left to the American violinist Albert Spalding, a witty and perspicacious observer of the musical scene who played on tour with her in her latter-day concerts, he has left a vivid glimpse of the incomparable old lady in action in this piece:

She was reckless enough to include an old-horse, "Il bacio." There were notes that simply could not be reached, scales and roulades that creaked at the hinges. It promised to be lamentable. But we reckoned without Patti. When she approached a passage where she apprehended difficulty, or perhaps disaster, she employed her fan with telling results. She would start the scale or arpeggio with aplomb, the fan in her outstretched arm slowly unfolding. This would continue to register beyond which lay danger. Then with a sudden gesture, the arm would fly up, the fan snapped shut with a click, the audience would burst into a tumult of applause drowning out both orchestra and voice, and triumph greeted a fioritura or a high note that was never heard.

VICTOR MAUREL (1848-1923)

Victor Maurel's obituary in the New York Sun, written by its eminent critic W. J. Henderson, is entitled "The Greatest of Singing Actors." No French singer before Maurel enjoyed such repute, nor would any do so again; perhaps it was no coincidence he was born in 1848 - an appropriately revolutionary year. He was not only a popular idol, highly regarded by critics, respected by managements, and held in awe by his colleagues; but he was much admired, in spite of an overweening ego and strongly accented Italian, by Verdi himself.

Born in Marseilles, as a boy he lived in Monte Carlo, where his father was one of the engineers who built the casino. At first he fancied himself a painter; this was the golden age of the French impressionists. Long after his singing career was over, in 1919, he provided the Metropolitan with designs for Gounod's *Mireille*, set in his native Provence. One may note this coincidence between Maurel and his predecessor, the baritone Jean-Baptiste Faure: both were attracted by the visual arts. Faure was one of the first great collectors of French impressionists, accumulating more than 200 works by such artists as Degas, Cézanne and Manet. A portrait of Faure by Manet, as Thomas's Hamlet, a role he created, hangs in the Folkwang Museum, Essen.

In 1866 Maurel joined the Paris Conservatoire, becoming a student of Vauthrot and Duvernoy. In only a year, with the bass Pedro Gailhard, he took first prize in singing opera. His career began at the top, in 1868, at the Paris Opéra, as de Luna in Verdi's *Le Trouvere*.

Over the next five years his progress was very rapid. After appearances at the Monnaie, Brussels, in 1870 he proceeded to Italy, to La Scala, Milan, creating *Il Cacico* in the world premiere of Gomes's *Il Guarany*. In 1871 he traveled on to Naples, to the San Carlo, where he sang Rodrigo in the Italian premiere of Verdi's *Don Carlo*. In 1872, across the channel, he made his Covent Garden bow, as Renato in *Ballo*. The Illustrated London News singled out his voice for immediate approval.

[He] possesses a baritone... of agreeable quality, and phrases like a cultivated vocalist. His stage bearing likewise indicat[ed] good training. We shall doubtless have further occasions to speak of his merits.

And so critics did, repeatedly. In 1873 he continued his progress, journeying across the Atlantic to New York's Academy of Music, where he sang *Amonasro* in the local premiere of *Aida*.

In Paris again in 1879, at the new Opéra, he challenged comparisons with Faure, undertaking Thomas's Hamlet for the first time - "it was no longer a singer who pretended to be Hamlet, it was a Hamlet who sang," one critic enthused. In 1883 he ventured his own season at the Theatre-Italien, introducing to Paris a number of world-class singers, including Jean and Edouard de Reszke, Félicia Litvinne and Emma Calvé, in several world premieres, including Massenet's *Hérodiade* in which he sang *Hérode*, and Dubois's *Aben Hamet*, in which *Alfaoma* was sung by Calvé.

Calvé, then a young woman, remembers him as "a man of genius":

His dramatic gifts were so extraordinary that they dominated the minds of those who saw him, and almost made them overlook his voice, which was, nevertheless, of unusual quality, full of colour and exceptionally expressive.

However, as an impresario he was less successful; the company went bankrupt. As Calvé tells, she only just managed to climb out of her dressing-room window with her costumes when the bailiffs arrived!

Maurel's histrionic range is confirmed by the variety of his repertory: Figaro in Rossini's opera, Assur in *Semiramide* and Guglielmo Tell; Belcore in Donizetti's *Elisir d'Amore*, Antonio in *Linda di Chamounix* and Alfonso in *Favorita*; Valentin and Méphistophéles in *Faust*; Carlo Quinto in Verdi's *Ernani*, *Rigoletto*, *di Luna*, *Germont*, Renato and *Amonasro*; Mozart's Figaro and Conte Almaviva, Don Giovanni and Papageno; Nevers in Meyerbeer's *Ugonotti*, Pietro in *Stella del Nord*, Hoel in *Dinorah* and Nélusko in *L'Africaine*; the Dutchman in Wagner's *Vascello Fantasma*, Telramondo in *Lohengrin* and Volframo in *Tannhäuser*.

It was after returning to La Scala, Milan in 1882, and singing the title-role in the first performance of the revised edition of Simon Boccanegra, that he began an association with Verdi that led to his creation of Iago in Otello in 1887, and six years afterwards, the title-role in Falstaff. He went on to sing both roles throughout the opera world, in Paris, St. Petersburg, Vienna, London and New York, always to great acclaim.

When Maurel introduced Iago in London at the Lyceum in 1889, Shaw, a stringent vocal critic, was on this occasion more preoccupied with Maurel the actor:

He played like a man who had read Shakespeare and had conceived an Iago with which he was thoroughly preoccupied... He was practised in identifying himself with it - had got under the skin of it, as the phrase goes. He had, too, emancipated himself from the prompter, and thus left himself nothing to think about but Iago. The result was he made a considerable reputation as an actor by the ordinary standard, whereas formerly [he was only one] by courtesy, and by contrast with [those] still more superficial than he.

That Verdi himself encouraged this new style of singing actor is apparent from a letter he wrote Maurel in 1894.

Study the lines and the words of the libretto, work over them as much as you feel inclined to; but do not preoccupy yourself too much with the music..[I]f the word-accent is properly stressed, then the music comes alive of itself, and is born, as it were, spontaneously.

In 1892 Maurel created Tonio in Pagliacci at the dal Verme, Milan. It was at Maurel's suggestion that Leoncavallo composed the Prologue, and Tonio originally had the last words: "la commedia e finita", a practice which continued as long as Maurel sang the role.

In 1894 he made his Met bow as Iago, following it two months later with Falstaff. Henderson, now at the New York Times, was very appreciative.

The chief honours of the performance naturally went to Maurel... [H]is Falstaff is one of the great creations of the lyric stage. ...His posing and facial expressions are the essence of comedy, and he makes every measure of the vocal part throb with meaning. It is superb, consistent thoroughly artistic piece of work which fully maintains his reputation.

Notwithstanding his great successes as Iago and Falstaff, in the '90s, and approaching fifty, he continued to undertake other roles. At the Met he sang Don Giovanni [an interpretation rated "the perfection of vocal art," with critical references to "the inimitable manner in which he sang the Serenade, a performance of marvelous lightness and grace", but by then de Nevers, Rigoletto, Valentin, Escamillo and Telramund were subject to the laws of marginal diminishing vocal returns. In 1899 when he returned to the Met for the last time and added Nélusko in L'Africaine, The New York Times wrote sadly, "by this time his days of bel canto are over."

He settled in New York and in 1908 gave, as Aldrich tactfully puts it, "an entertainment in Carnegie Hall". Of his voice it was thought prudent to say as little as possible.

There is still to be admired his skill in diction and the rhetorical expression he frequently gives to the music. [While in opera excerpts] he gave... a really splendid dramatic intensity and conviction in the way that transfixed the listeners' attention... and put the deficiencies of his voice into momentary forgetfulness.

He made his final stage appearance in Paris in 1909 alongside some pupils in Grétry's Le Tableau Parlant, a performance conducted by the then thirty-year old Thomas Beecham. He gave lectures in Paris, London and New York, contributed to various journals some essays on musico-dramatic subjects, and wrote an autobiography, Dix ans de carrière [1897]. He was still active as a teacher after the First World War; one of his last students was Lillian Gish.

We earlier quoted the violinist Albert Spalding on the subject of Patti, and the last words on Maurel can also be left to him. After a dinner in 1906, as "chasse-café" to the improvised accompaniment of Landon Ronald.

Maurel sang the 'Credo' from Otello, bits of Falstaff and Don Giovanni's Serenade. His voice... had gone threadbare, but the majesty of an undying art was still there. He couldn't possibly have sung a real forte. He had to suggest it, but how he suggested it! After all these years it is Maurel's portrayal of the naked villainy of Iago, the sophisticated and Rabelaisian philosophy of Falstaff, the elegant and unscrupulous licentiousness of [Don Giovanni] that I recall each time that I hear this music. He sang a little song by Massenet - a rather cheap and sugar-coated morsel in which an old gallant recalls to his marquise when and where she wore a dress of white satin. Maurel whispered this not-too-distinguished text with a kind of magical subtlety that was transfiguring.

Fortunately we get a good idea of the effect he worked when we listen to those recordings he made at almost exactly the same time.

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TRACK LISTING

CD 1 (72:14)

Adelina Patti

Gramophone and Typewriter Company

Recorded at Craig-y-nos Castle, Patti's home in Wales / December 1905

1. LE NOZZE DI FIGARO: Voi che sapete (Mozart) 3:08
(537f) 03051
2. Pur dicesti, o bocca bella (Lotti) 3:51
(538f) 03052
3. Home, sweet home (Bishop; words by Payne) 3:36
(539f) 03053
4. Old folks at home (Foster) 3:05
(540f) 03054
5. DON GIOVANNI: Batti, batti, o bel Masetto (Mozart) 3:27
(541f) 03055/Transposed down a whole tone to E-flat
6. FAUST: Ah! je ris de me voir si belle {Jewel Song} (Gounod) 2:35
(542f) unpublished/Transposed down a semi-tone to E-flat
7. FAUST: Ah! je ris de me voir si belle {Jewel Song} (Gounod) 2:43
(543f) 03056/Transposed down a semi-tone to E-flat
8. Il bacio (Arditi) 2:35
(544f) unpublished
9. Kathleen Mavourneen (Crouch; words by Crawford) 4:23
(545f) 03057
10. MARTHA: The last rose of summer (Old Irish Air; arr. Flotow; words by Moore)
2:39
(546f) published only on HMB 78/in F
11. Ave Maria (Bach-Gounod) 2:26
with Marianne Eisler, violin / (547f) first published on IRCC 33
12. La Serenata (Tosti; words by Cesareo) 3:16
(548f) 03058
13. Robin Adair (Old Scottish Air; words by Keppel) 2:26
(549f) 03059
14. Home, sweet home (Bishop; words by Payne) 3:53
(550f) unpublished
15. Si vous n'avez rien a me dire (Rothschild) 2:47
(551f) 03060
16. Comin' thro' the rye (Old Scottish Air; words by Robert Burns) 1:42
(552f) 03061
17. MARTHA: The last rose of summer (Old Irish Air; arr. Flotow; words by Moore)
2:50
(553f) 03062/Transposed down a semi-tone to E
18. The banks of Allan Water (Old Scottish Air; arr. Charles Horn) 3:05
(555f) unpublished
19. On parting (Patti; words by Byron) 2:44
(556f) 03063
20. 'Twas within a mile of Edinboro' town (Hook) 2:32
(557f) 03064/in G-flat
21. New Year's greeting to Baron Cederström from Adelina Patti 0:22
unpublished

June 1906

22. Kathleen Mavourneen (Crouch; words by Crawford) 4:40
(676c) 03078
23. La Serenata (Tosti; words by Cesareo) 3:15
(677c) 03079
24. 'Twas within a mile of Edinboro' town (Hook) 2:33
(678c) unpublished (assigned 03080)/in G

Tracks 1-20 accompanied by Landon Ronald, piano; Tracks 22-24 accompanied by Alfredo Barili (Patti's nephew), piano
 Languages: English [3, 4, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16-22, 24]; French [6, 7, 15]; Italian [1, 2, 5, 8, 12, 23]; Latin [11]

CD 2 (76:18)

1. NORMA: Casta diva (Bellini) 3:56
(681c) 03082/Transposed down a whole tone to E-flat
2. MIGNON: Connais-tu le pays? (Thomas) 2:47
(682c) 03083/in D-flat
3. LA SONNAMBULA: Ah! non credea mirarti (Bellini) 3:23
(683c) 03084/in G minor
4. La Calesera (Yradier) 3:09
(684 1/2 c) 03085/in D-flat
5. NORMA: Casta diva (Bellini) 3:43
(681c) 03082/Remastered in E
6. MIGNON: Connais-tu le pays? (Thomas) 2:38
(682c) 03083/Remastered in D
7. LA SONNAMBULA: Ah! non credea mirarti (Bellini) 3:12
(683c) 03084/Remastered in G-sharp minor
8. La Calesera (Yradier) 2:45
(684 1/2 c) 03085/Remastered in D

Victor Maurel

Gramophone and Typewriter Company / Paris, 1903

9. Chanson du printemps (Gounod) 2:49
(1626F) 2-32815
10. IPHIGENIE EN TAURIDE: Le ciel par d'éclatants miracles... De noirs
pressentiments (Gluck) 3:32
(1627F) 2-32809
11. Marquise (Massenet) 2:49
(1628F) 2-32810
12. L'Heure exquise (Hahn) 3:19
(1629F) 2-32811
13. Le rondel de l'adieu (De Lara) 3:32
(1630F) 2-32812
14. Fédia (D'Erlanger) 3:43
(1631F) 2-32813
15. OTELLO: Era la notte (Verdi) 3:05
(1632F) 2-32814

Fonotipia Company / Milano, November 1904

16. OTELLO: Era la notte (Verdi) 3:03
(XPh 583) 39042
17. Marechiaro (Tosti; words by Di Giacomo) 2:28
(XPh 65) 39032
18. DON GIOVANNI: Deh! vieni alla finestra (Mozart) 2:00
(XPh 66) 39041
19. Le rondel de l'adieu (De Lara) 2:57
(XPh 67) 39246
20. Mandolinata (Paladilhe) 2:46
(XPh 682) 39245
21. Ninon (Tosti) 4:08
(XPh 692) 39247

Fonotipia Company / London, January 1907

22. FALSTAFF: Quand'ero paggio (Verdi) 2:24
(XPh 2332) 62016
23. A year ago (D'Hardelot) 3:03
(XPh 2333) 62018
24. Au temps du grand roi (Tosti) 3:23
(XPh 2334) 62017

Tracks 1-8 accompanied by Alfredo Barili (Patti's nephew), piano
 Languages: English [23]; French [2,6,9-14,19, 21, 22, 24]; Italian [1,3,5,7,15-18, 20, 22];
 Spanish [4,8]

Producers: Jeffrey Miller and Ward Marston
Audio Conservation: Ward Marston
Booklet Design: Takeshi Takahashi

Marston would like to thank Richard Bebb, Sir Paul Getty, Victor Girard, Harry S. Glaze, Lawrence F. Holdridge, Andrew Karzas and Peter Lack for their help in the production of this CD release.

The following selections are re-recorded from copies in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Laurence C. Witten II in the Yale Collection of Historical Sound Recordings, Yale University Library CD1 [21] CD2 [10-14]