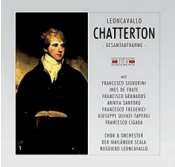
Ruggero Leoncavallo – Chatterton 1908



Thomas Chatterton - Francisco Granados Thomas chatterton - Francesco Signorini John Clark - Francesco Frederici Jenny Clark - Ines de Frate Piccolo Henry - Annita Santoro Giorgio - Giuseppe Quinzi-Tapergi Lord Klifford - Francesco Cigada Skirner - Gaetano Pini-Corsi Orchestra e Coro del Teatro alla Scala di Milano Recorded in Milan, May 1908 Opera in three acts Recorded in twenty-six parts.

It's impossible to overstate how rare these twenty-eight 1908 sides actually are. No one collector or archive holds all of them. The opera was conducted by the composer and the process by which he came to direct the opera for the recording – fees, negotiations – are splendidly set forth in Marston's typically extensive, splendidly illustrated booklet.

One of the most bizarre features of the recording was the doubling of the role of Chatterton. Tenors Francisco Granados and Francesco Signorini alternate the role; as to why, no one seems quite sure, though speculation is advanced. Signorini was an excellent singer and a thoughtful musician but Granados was a blusterer as one can hear as early as Charley! Holger! which launches the opera. Signorini was a decade older than his colleague but shows in his exchanges with Quinzi-Tapergi's Giorgio how superior he is in every way imaginable. Annita Santoro is little known – there's a paucity of biographical information about her though we know that she was born in 1885. Rather laconically the notes about her opine that "it is to be hoped that, in order to appear to be a young boy (she is Young Henry, a "pants" role) she intentionally adopted the sound she makes on this recording." This piece of drollery relates to the very tight fluttering vibrato she adopts – most audibly in her Act II exchange with Chatterton Là…là…presso a quel tavolo. It is indeed a bizarre sound.

The other cast members are certainly of acceptable to middling standard; the orchestra doesn't sound too well prepared and doubtless it wasn't even with the composer at the helm. I realise

that I've not gone into details regarding the opera as such – its effectiveness or otherwise or the historical circumstances that gave rise to Leonvacallo's taking Chatterton's life as the theme of his opera. That however is, I think, of lesser importance. This exceptionally rare set can give only a limited theatrical impression of the work in toto – and though there are some fine scenes it's not a convincing theatrical work. --- -- Jonathan Woolf, MusicWeb International

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