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HISTORIC SOUND

## "Cav and Pag": Historic performances

Mascagni: Cavalleria Rusticana + Leoncavallo: Pagliacci



The British National Opera Company

conducted by Eugene Goossens, Aymer Buesst  
featuring Heddle Nash, Miriam Licette, Harold Williams, Dennis Noble, May Blyth,  
Marjorie Parry, Frank Mullings & Justine Griffiths

*original recordings 1927*

*digitally remastered*

# CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA (Rustic Chivalry)

A Melodrama in One Act by Pietro Mascagni - English words by Frederic E. Weatherly.

Principals, Chorus and Orchestra of the British National Opera Company,  
conducted by Aylmer Buesst

1	Prelude	[1.55]	11	So thou seest what thou hast done	[2.46]
2	Siciliana	[2.09]	12	Ah, 'tis the Lord who hast sent thee	[2.53]
3	Prelude (reprise)	[2.20]	13	Sweet Mistress Santa	[1.42]
4	Opening Chorus	[2.41]	14	Intermezzo	[2.45]
5	Tell me, Mother Lucia	[2.41]	15	Now homeward returning	[2.03]
6	Gaily go my horses fleet	[2.12]	16	Drinking Song	[2.36]
7	Easter Hymn	[5.34]	17	Ah! My friends, I salute you	[2.47]
8	Mother, you know the story	[3.06]	18	Mother, that wine burns me	[3.21]
9	You here, Santuzza?	[2.39]	19	FINALE: Turiddu, where go you?	[1.16]
10	O gentle flower of gold	[2.41]			

*Published by Ascherberg Hopwood & Crew*

**total duration (disc A): [50.10]**

## CAST:

**Santuzza (betrothed to Turiddu):**

**Lola, wife of Alfio:**

**Lucia, mother of Turridu:**

**Turiddu, a young soldier:**

**Alfio, a teamster:**

**With Chorus of Villagers**

**May Blyth, soprano**

**Marjorie Parry, mezzo-soprano**

**Justine Griffiths, contralto**

**Hedde Nash, tenor**

**Harold Williams, baritone**

**Pietro Mascagni** (1863-1945) was the son of a baker in Leghorn, Italy, who became a musician and afterwards conductor of a band in Cerignola, a small Italian town. Learning that Sonzogno, the music publishers, were organising an operatic competition, Mascagni decided to submit an opera based on a story which had been given to him by Giovanni Verga. Mascagni and his family were not by any means affluent, and he had to borrow his railway fare to Milan, where he hoped to find someone to supply the libretto. After much disappointment, he finally arranged for Targioni-Tozzetti to write the text. The latter failed to finish it, and to assist him, brought in G. Menaschi, who completed the work.

Mascagni then started work on the music. The townspeople of Cerignola laughed at the idea of Mascagni, an unknown rustic, competing. The opera completed, it arrived three days late, but fortunately for the composer, it was not disqualified. A few days later, Mascagni's spirits were raised by notification that his opera was one of 72 accepted for audition, and a request for him to travel immediately to Rome. Again he had to borrow money for the journey. He took with him a short song, at that time not in the score of the opera, which turned out to be the "Siciliana". This was played over with the rest of the opera at the audition, and its reception persuaded him to include it. Mascagni returned home, and a

week later was informed that he had been awarded the first prize. First produced at the Constanzi Theatre on May 17, 1890, the opera was an instantaneous success, Mascagni becoming famous literally overnight. None of his other works have remained nearly as popular.

## Synopsis

We are in a rural village in Sicily, on Easter Morning. Turiddu, a young peasant, son of Lucia, has returned from military service to find that his sweetheart Lola has married Alfio, a prosperous village haulage contractor (or "teamster"). Spitefully, and deeply hurt, he pursues and seduces Santuzza. However, Lola's love for him revives, and he, still smitten with her, accepts her once again. At the beginning of the opera, the curtain is down and Turiddu sings from behind it, by way of prelude to the story, a song to Lola, declaring the love which has brought him once more to her side, and hinting at some dark shadow which lies over their futures.

The curtain rises to the song of peasants coming from their early morning toil to attend the Easter festival in the village church. Santuzza, burning with anxiety and suspicion, enters and asks Lucia about Turiddu's movements. Lucia, trying to protect her son, tells her that her son has gone for wine to the

neighbouring Francofonte, but Santuzza reveals that in fact he had never left the village. Upon this scene of Santuzza's misery, and the mother's newly-roused suspicions, Alfio breaks in, returning with his team, and singing a song of his hard but happy life, and of his utter faith in his pretty wife Lola. His joy is fleeting, however, for the mention by Lucia of Turiddu's name reminds him that he had seen him only that morning lurking by his cottage. But Santuzza will not betray her faithless lover, and bids Lucia be silent. From the church we hear the sound of the mass, and the villagers, assembling in the square, sing their Easter anthem, and all go in to the service together.

Left alone with Lucia, Santuzza tells her miserable story, of how Turiddu had won her love and taken her honour, and then had gone back to his old love Lola. Just then Turiddu enters, looking no doubt for Lola, and certainly very perturbed to see Santuzza instead. She reproaches and implores him in turn. But he will not relent, because now Lola's love is all he wants, and Santuzza is nothing to him. As if to emphasise the bitterness of this blow, Lola is heard singing outside, and presently enters, only to banter with Turiddu and mock at Santuzza. Turiddu is infuriated at Lola's mockery, which he attributes to Santuzza's presence. He tells Santuzza to leave him, turns a deaf ear to her prayers and reproaches,

and when she clings to him, flings her to the ground, and leaving her senseless on the steps of the church enters in pursuit of Lola.

As Santuzza recovers herself, she finds Alfio near her, and maddened by Turiddu's cruel behaviour, she tells Alfio of his wife's dishonour, and of Turiddu's betrayal. Alfio, in some way already prepared for this, vows vengeance on the guilty pair.

After a short pause, during which the stage remains empty and we hear the famous *Intermezzo*, the villagers come from the church with Lola and Turiddu among them, and as they all crowd round him he merrily sings a drinking song, and recklessly toasts Lola, to which she as carelessly responds. At this most inopportune moment the injured husband returns. He enters with set face, and though he greets his friends it is evident to all that something awful is about to occur. So, when Turiddu offers Alfio a cup, Alfio indignantly refuses the invitation. A cup from the hand of Turiddu would be a poisoned one, he believes. Lola knows all is discovered, and is terrified at what might be coming next. The women whisper together, and lead her away. Then Alfio challenges Turiddu to a duel, according to local custom, by biting the left ear, and goes out to the appointed meeting-place. After a heart-broken farewell to his mother, and one touch of remorse in



which he bids her guard Santuzza, who he had so wronged, Turiddu follows his adversary. The fight is soon over. Santuzza, who has just heard what has happened, rushes to Lucia to ask for her lover. But the only answer is the cry of the villagers: "Turiddu is killed! Turiddu is killed!" Thus "Rural Chivalry" is satisfied, and the curtain falls upon the fainting forms of Lucia and Santuzza.

Technical Note by Andrew Rose:  
(Cavalleria Rusticana)

"When I put the first side of this recording on my turntable for the first time I was totally astonished at the sound quality. At the time I had yet to research the date of recording, so I immediately assumed it was much later than 1927. The set was one of my earliest acquisitions, but, due to a variety of diversions, it sat on the shelf for nearly two years before I tackled it properly for this release.

Clearly the Columbia engineers of the day were good at their job - despite this being so early in the era of microphone recordings, the only major problem to deal with was a tendency towards overload distortion at the highest peaks. Otherwise the discs were in excellent condition, and I was able to work with minimal intervention."

*Cavalleria Rusticana* was recorded in 1927 and issued on Columbia 10" dark blue label records.

Catalogue and matrix numbers:

5127	WA6670
	WA7896
5128	WA6699
	WA6671
5129	WA6672
	WA7893
5130	WA6687
	WA6688
5131	WA7895
	WA7894
5132	WA6700
	WA6676
5133	WA6689
	WA6690
5134	WA6701
	WA6702
5135	WA6703
	WA6704
5136	WA7257
	WA6705

## LIBRETTO:

### [1] Prelude

#### [2] TURIDDU (*from behind curtain*)

O Lola! pretty one, white as the may, love,  
Red as the rose thy cheeks, fair as the day, love,  
Ah, for that heart of thine, loving and tender,  
Life, soul and all that is mine, here I surrender,  
Dark though the shadows be over thy portal,  
Bodeth it heav'n or hell, love is immortal;  
So when I die at last, we shall not sever,  
Heav'n would be where thou art, sweet, then and for ever!

### [3] Reprise of Prelude

*(The curtain rises. The stage is empty)*

#### [4] CHORUS OF WOMEN (*offstage*)

Sweetly the birds in the myrtles are carolling,  
Bright gleam the orange flow'rs, citron, and bay.  
Ah, golden time of spring,  
When life and love are gay,  
When all our hearts sing  
Ever a joyous lay!  
*(The women enter)*

#### CHORUS OF MEN (*offstage*)

Across the field we hear your happy voices,  
Afar we hear your busy spindles humming;  
And, listening, every heart with love rejoices,  
As home to you with joyous feet we're coming!  
O Love, thou star of our being! Hearts that we worship,  
As the eagles fly homeward to you we're coming!  
*(The men enter)*

*Enter Santuzza and Lucia*

### [5] SANTUZZA

Tell me, Mother Lucia –

### LUCIA

What then? What want you?

### SANTUZZA

Where is Turiddu?

### LUCIA

Why then come you  
To ask me where my son is?

### SANTUZZA

Ah, be not angry, Mother,  
It is all that I ask thee. Where is Turiddu?

### LUCIA

I know not. Why do you trouble me?

### SANTUZZA

Mother Lucia, on my knees I implore thee;  
As our Lord was of old to Magdalene,  
So be thou kind to me! Tell me, dear mother, I implore thee, where  
is Turiddu?

### LUCIA

He went last night for wine to Francofonte.

### SANTUZZA

Nay, last night in the village here they saw him.

### LUCIA

What say you? Has he perchance returned?  
*(She goes towards her cottage and points to it)*  
Enter!

### SANTUZZA (*shrinking back*)

Into your house I dare not enter! I, who am accursed!

### LUCIA

What of my son, then, have you to tell me?

### SANTUZZA

Ah, my heart is broken!

*The sound of bells and horses' hooves is heard from outside. Then enter Alfio and the Chorus.*

[6] ALFIO

Gaily go my horses fleet,  
Jingling bells and tramping feet:-  
Who's for the road, So-ho!  
Though my back is white with snow,  
Rain may beat and tempest blow,  
Never a care I know.  
While I gaily sing my song,  
As my wagon rolls along –  
Who's for the road, Ho-la!

CHORUS

Oh, the jolly life, boys,  
Free from care and strife, boys,  
He drives his team along!  
Hey for the road, boys! *Etc.*

ALFIO

So wherso'er I roam, boys,  
My wife keeps watch at home, boys.  
Tender and true is she—  
Her heart's my sweetest treasure,  
Her love my brightest pleasure,  
She's all the world to me,  
So I gaily sing my song,  
As I drive my team along –  
Then who's for the road, Ho-la!

CHORUS

Oh, the jolly life, boys, etc

LUCIA (*to Alfio*)

Ah, my friend, you are happy  
To be always so gaily.

ALFIO (*gaily*)

Mother Lucia,  
Have you no more that good old wine?

LUCIA

Not yet. Turiddu has gone away to buy some.

ALFIO

It is not true! 'Twas but this morn I saw him  
Beside my cottage lurking.

LUCIA (*with surprise*)

How so?

SANTUZZA (*aside to Lucia*)

Be silent!

*(Singing is heard from the church – Lucia points to it)*

ALFIO (*shaking his head*)

I cannot enter. Go ye to Mass without me.  
*(he exits)*

[7] CHORUS (*within the church*)

Regina coeli, laetare,  
Alleluia!  
Quia quem menuisti, portare,  
Alleluia!  
Resurrexit, sicut dixit,  
Alleluia!

CHORUS (*of people in the square*)

O rejoice that the Lord has arisen!  
He has conquered the power of the grave,  
He has broken the gate of the prison,  
He has risen in glory to save!

[8] SANTUZZA

Mother, you know the story? Ere he to war departed  
Turiddu swore to Lola ever to be true-hearted –  
Through days and years, through hopes and fears, true-hearted!  
He came! But she was wedded. Know you the tale, dear mother?  
To a new love he turned him – thus to forget the other.  
He loved me! I loved him! I love him still!  
They met again! Then with the old love waking,  
All her vows forsaking, wild in her jealous madness,  
She stole my lover, and all my gladness!  
Why, ah why should I live, then? –  
Honour and love departed!

LUCIA  
Ah, my poor Santa! Is this the news you tell me on this holy Easter?

[9] TURIDDU (*entering*)  
You here, Santuzza?

SANTUZZA  
For you I'm waiting.

TURIDDU (*pointing to the church*)  
'Tis Easter! Why go you not yonder?

SANTUZZA  
I cannot! I have something to tell you.

TURIDDU  
Where is my mother?

SANTUZZA  
Will you not listen?

TURIDDU (*hastily*)  
Not here! Not here!

SANTUZZA  
Where have you come from?

TURIDDU  
Why do you ask me? -  
From Francofonte.

SANTUZZA  
Nay, it is false!

TURIDDU  
Santa! I swear to you -

SANTUZZA  
Nay, but thou liest!  
With mine own eyes did I see you last night,  
And at this very dawn they saw you stealing  
From the cottage of Lola!

TURIDDU  
Ah, were you spying?

SANTUZZA  
No, I swear I spied not. The news was just now told me  
By the husband of her – who is – thy love!

TURIDDU  
Is this thy love for the love I gave you?  
Would you then kill me?

SANTUZZA  
Ah, say not that, Turiddu!

TURIDDU  
Go then and leave me! In vain you strive  
To change my anger, to change my scorn.

SANTUZZA  
You love Lola!

TURIDDU  
No!

SANTUZZA  
So sweet she is, so lovely.

TURIDDU  
Silence! I love her not.

SANTUZZA  
You love her! - And I - I curse her!

TURIDDU  
Santuzza!

SANTUZZA  
Yes, that accursed woman  
Hath stolen thy heart from me!

TURIDDU  
Hear me, Santuzza – vain is thy pleading.  
Thou wilt not turn me, thou wilt not move me.

SANTUZZA

Spurn me then - scorn me, then, cold and unheeding;  
Yet I forgive thee – still I shall love thee!

[10] LOLA (*outside*)

O gentle flower of gold,  
Close to my beating heart I hold thee, dreaming,  
Heav'n has no flow'r above so sweetly gleaming!

O gentle flow'r of love,  
Heav'n has a thousand stars of gold above me,  
I ask but one in all the world to love me,  
O gentle flow'r of love!  
(*Lola enters*)  
Ah, Turiddu! Tell me, where is Alfio?

TURIDDU

I cannot tell you. I know not.

LOLA

Maybe he lingers by yonder smithy.  
He will soon be coming.  
(*ironically*) And you – is this the place for your devotions?

TURIDDU (*confused*)

Santuzza here was saying -

SANTUZZA

Yes, I said today was Easter,  
And that our Lord all hearts beholdeth.

LOLA (*pointing to the church*)

Why are you not at Mass then?

SANTUZZA

Ah, nay! They only pray  
Whose hearts are free from sin and stainless.

LOLA

Then thanks be to Heav'n! I am quite holy.

SANTUZZA (*ironically*)

Ah, you are holy – you are oh so holy, Lola!

TURIDDU (*to Lola*)

Come, Lola, come. Why do we tarry longer?

LOLA (*shaking him off*)

Stay – with your lover!

SANTUZZA (*to Turiddu*)

Turiddu, Stay then!  
Yes, yes! So much to tell thee.

LOLA (*ironically*)

Let me give you my blessing, my pretty lovers!

[*Lola exits into the church*]

[11] TURIDDU

So thou seest what thou hast done.

SANTUZZA

It was thyself. 'Tis well. So be it.

TURIDDU (*making as to strike her*)

By heaven!

SANTUZZA

Spare me not – slay me!

TURIDDU (*restraining himself*)

No!

SANTUZZA (*clinging to him*)

Turiddu – hear me!

TURIDDU (*throwing her aside*)

Go!

SANTUZZA

Stay, stay, Turiddu! Why art thou so cold and unheeding?  
Ah, take me back to thy heart once more.

TURIDDU

Nay! All is over. Vain is thy pleading!  
Why wilt thou keep me? I love thee no more.  
Nay! All is over. Vain is thy pleading!  
My heart is steel – my heart is steel!

SANTUZZA

Turiddu, hear me! List to my calling!  
See my tears are falling!

TURIDDU

Go – go and leave me. Seek not to move me,  
Vainly you love me.  
What has been said can ne'er be unspoken.

SANTUZZA

My heart is broken!  
Stay, stay, Turiddu! Why art thou so cold and unheeding?  
*Etc, etc.*

Beware!

TURIDDU

Rage on! I care not for your anger.  
*{He pushes her away and strides into the church}*

SANTUZZA (*bitterly*)

Curst be thine Easter, you traitor!  
*[She falls exhausted]*

*[enter Alfio]*

[12] SANTUZZA (*recovering*)

Ah! 'tis the Lord who hath sent you, Master Alfio!

ALFIO (*calmly*)

Have they finished their praying?

SANTUZZA

Yes – it is finished.  
Come, then, listen... Lola betrays you for Turiddu!

ALFIO (*astonished*)

What do you tell me?

SANTUZZA

That while you were driving  
In storm and tempest,

To make a home for Lola,  
Lola has brought thy happy home dishonour!

ALFIO

Ah, Santuzza – by Heaven! Tell me what mean you?

SANTUZZA

'Tis true! Turiddu hath stolen mine honour,  
And your false wife hath stolen his heart from me.

ALFIO

If thou liest, Santuzza, I swear to kill thee.

SANTUZZA

Ah, no! My lips would not deceive thee,  
'Tis but the truth I say.  
By all this shame of mine, by all my sorrow,  
It is the truth, the bitter truth, I tell thee.

[13] ALFIO

Sweet Mistress Santa, one day I will thank thee!

SANTUZZA

Ah, wretched I, that told thee all thy woe!

ALFIO

Ah, faithless traitors, my heart is broken!  
His doom is spoken!  
Ere day is done, his blood shall flow.

SANTUZZA

What have I said? What have I done?

ALFIO

By all my shame I swear it –  
My love is turned to bitter hate,  
Or e'er the stars in Heav'n may shine,  
His blood shall flow – revenge is mine!

*[Exit Alfio]*

[14] Intermezzo

[15] CHORUS OF VILLAGERS

Now homeward, now homeward returning,  
Sing we a merry lay,  
Ah, happy Easter-day; bright happy Easter-day!  
Homeward away! away!

[16] TURIDDU (*to Lola, who is leaving*)

Sweet Mistress Lola, are you going to leave us  
Without one little word of greeting?

LOLA

I must not linger, for my husband is waiting!

TURIDDU

Ah, what of that, dear? Let him wait then.

[*to the villagers*]

Then come, my friends, I say,  
And drink a cup together.

[*He fills and lifts a cup of wine*]

See the merry wine is winking,  
See the bubbles brightly blinking,  
Then, comrades, let's be drinking  
With a merry roundelay!  
Here's the friend who will not sever,  
Here's the love that loves for ever,  
Here's the wine that fails us never,  
Fill, then, high, and drink away!  
Viva! drink! and join the chorus,  
Though tomorrow darken o'er us,  
What care we what lies before us,  
While we've wine to quaff today!

CHORUS

Viva! viva!  
See the merry wine is winking, *etc, etc.*

TURIDDU (*to Lola*)

To all true lovers! (*he drinks*)

LOLA (*to Turiddu*)

To your long life and fortune! (*she drinks*)

CHORUS

Drink on! Drink on!

Fill high, fill high your flagons,  
Merrily the wine is winking, *etc, etc.*  
*Enter Alfio*

[17] ALFIO

My friends, I salute you!

ALL

You are welcome, Alfio.

TURIDDU

You are welcome. Let's have a drink together.  
Come, then, here is the goblet (*He fills a cup*)

ALFIO

Thank you. The wine you give, I cannot drink it;  
There is poison within it. I will not drink it.

TURIDDU

'Tis as you please. (*He throws the wine to the ground*)  
[*to Alfio*]

Have you still something to tell me?

ALFIO

I? - Nothing!

TURIDDU

Well, then I am here at your service.

ALFIO

You mean it?

TURIDDU

I mean it.

[*They embrace, but Turiddu bites Alfio's right ear as a challenge*]

ALFIO

Master Turiddu, I will accept your challenge.  
So be it then. We understand each other.

TURIDDU

Master Alfio, I know that I have wronged you;  
But blame not Lola. By Heaven above thee,  
I swear the fault was mine alone.

But if you kill me, who will care for Santa,  
Lonely and deserted? Who will protect her?  
Ah, that I had loved her! Ah, poor Santa!  
Come then, let's try whose knife is longest.

ALFIO

I'm ready. Let him win whose arm is strongest.  
I await you yonder in the garden.  
(Exit)

[18] TURIDDU (*calling*)

Mother!

[*Lucia enters*]

Mother, that wine burns me like fire!  
Why did I drink it? It burns me!  
I am going, dearest mother.  
But ere I leave thee, bless me, O my mother,  
As once you blessed me when I went to battle.  
Yet one thing, mother, one only:  
If I return not, mother, for ever,  
Guard my poor Santuzza, and be to her a mother;  
She whom I deserted will have no one beside thee.  
Guard her, O my mother! – my poor Santuzza!

LUCIA

Why say you this, my son? Alas, what mean you?

TURIDDU

Nay, mother, 'tis nothing. I was only dreaming.  
Be not afraid, sweet mother; but pray for me to Heaven;  
Farewell – one kiss, dear mother – only once more.  
Farewell! And if I die, be thou to her a mother.  
Farewell, mother, farewell!  
(*he exits hastily*)

[19] LUCIA (*rushing after him*)

Turiddu! Where go you? Turiddu!

(*to Santuzza, who enters*)

Santuzza!

SANTUZZA

Ah, dearest mother!

[*Santuzza throws herself into Lucia's arms, as the stage fills with a crowd, looking frightened, questioning one another. There are confused sounds without*]

VOICES (*outside*)

Turiddu is killed ! Turiddu is killed!

[*Santuzza and Lucia fall senseless, surrounded by the village women, and the curtain falls quickly*]

END

NOTE: The libretto printed is taken so far as possible from the actual singing, as this varies from Weatherly's original. This applies to both operas.



# I PAGLIACCI

An Opera in Two Acts by Ruggiero Leoncavallo, English words by Frederic E. Weatherly.  
Principals, Chorus & Orchestra of the British National Opera Company,  
conducted by Eugene Goossens Snr.

1 Act I Prelude	[2.39]	13 Tread lightly, lightly	[2.43]
2 Prologue	[4.51]	14 Ah, stay, good master	[2.42]
3 They come, they come	[2.38]	15 On with the motley	[2.36]
4 This evening at seven o’ the clock	[2.24]	16 Act II Intermezzo	[2.32]
5 Such a game	[2.33]	17 Quickly, sweet gossips	[2.37]
6 Hark, ‘tis the bagpipes	[3.40]	18 Opening of the play	[2.32]
7 How fierce he looked	[1.55]	19 Ah yes, ‘tis now the hour	[2.32]
8 High aloft they cry (“ballatela”)	[2.38]	20 Pure, yes I know thou art	[2.39]
9 I know that you hate me	[2.37]	21 Pour the philtre in his wine	[2.22]
10 You mock me?	[2.37]	22 No, Punchinello, no more	[2.23]
11 My fate is in thy hands	[2.41]	23 If thou deemest me so unworthy	[2.45]
12 Why hast thou taught me	[2.41]		

**total duration (disc B): [62.19]**

## CAST:

**Nedda act 1/Columbine act 2:**

**Canio act 1/Punchinello act 2:**

**Tonio act 1/Taddeo act 2:**

**Peppe act 1/Harlequin act 2:**

**Silvio:**

**With Chorus of Villagers and Peasants**

**Miriam Licette**

**Frank Mullings**

**Harold Williams**

**Heddle Nash**

**Dennis Noble**

# LIBRETTO

## [1] Act I Prelude

### [2] PROLOGUE (TONIO)

A word - allow me! Sweet ladies and gentlemen,  
I pray you hear, why alone I appear,  
I am the Prologue!  
Our author loves the custom of a prologue to his story,  
And as he would revive for you the ancient glory,  
He sends me to speak before ye.  
But not to prate, as once of old,  
That the tears of the actor are false, unreal  
That his sighs and cries, and the pain that is told,  
- He has no heart to feel  
No! No! Our author tonight a chapter will borrow  
From life with its laughter and sorrow.  
Is not the actor a man with a heart like you?  
So 'tis for men that our author has written,  
And the story he tells you is true!  
A song of tender memories deep in his listening heart  
One day was ringing; and then with a trembling hand, he wrote  
it,  
And marked the time with sighs and tears... Come then  
On the stage you shall behold us, in human fashion,  
And see the sad fruits of love and passion!  
Hearts that weep and languish, cries of rage and anguish,  
And bitter laughter... Ah think then - sweet people,  
When ye look on us, clad in our motley and tinsel,  
Ours are human hearts, beating with passion,  
We all are men like you, for gladness or sorrow,  
'Tis the same broad Heaven above us,  
The same wide world lies before us!  
Will ye hear then the story, how it unfolds itself, surely and certain?  
Come then! Ring up the curtain!

Act 1, Scene 1 – Before the Theatre

### [3] OPENING CHORUS - MEN AND WOMEN

They come, they come,  
With pipe and drum,  
This way they come,  
This way they come,

Here's a pretty Columbine  
And Punchinello,  
A merry fellow,  
With laugh and jest  
They come, they come.  
Look how sedately  
He smiles and passes,  
Beating his drum  
With a nod to the lasses.  
BOYS  
Hi there! Harlequin!  
Whip up your donkey!  
CANIO  
Go to the devil  
PEPPE  
Take that, you monkey!  
Keep back! They're coming now,  
The waggon's coming!  
Oh what an awful row!  
Oh what a drumming!  
VILLAGERS  
Hail, Punchinello!  
Long live the merry king,  
Who keeps us mellow!  
He is the blithest fellow!  
Long life to him we sing.  
Hail, Punchinello! *etc...* '85..  
CANIO  
Thank you!  
VILLAGERS  
Bravo!  
CANIO  
Allow me.  
VILLAGERS  
Now then begin the play!  
CANIO (beating drum)  
Gentlemen all.  
VILLAGERS  
You deafen us. Do stop, I say!  
CANIO  
A word, a word, I pray!  
VILLAGERS  
Hush! Hush! Do be quiet pray,  
Begin and say your say!

[4] CANIO

This evening at seven of the clock I invite you  
To see our performance, I know 'twill delight you.  
We'll show you the sorrows of poor Punchinello,  
And the vengeance he wreaked on a treacherous fellow;  
And Tony the clown with his big corporation,  
And strange combination of love and of hate.

O come then, and honour us,  
You'll all be delighted,  
At seven you're invited,  
At seven you're invited!

VILLAGERS

With pleasure, with pleasure!  
We all are delighted,  
At seven we're invited!  
At seven we're invited!

*(Tonio advances to help Nedda down from the cart. But Canio boxes his ears.)*

CANIO

Get away!  
*(Lifts Nedda down)*

WOMEN *(to Tonio)*

How d'you like it, pretty lover?

BOYS

How d'you like it?  
*(Tonio shakes his fist at boys)*

TONIO *(aside)*

Oh he shall pay me, you'll discover!

VILLAGER *(to Canio)*

Say! Wilt drink with me a measure?  
They sell good liquor at the tavern yonder.

CANIO

With pleasure!

PEPPE

I say! Wait you two!  
I'll come with you!

CANIO

Hi! Tonio, art thou coming?

TONIO

I've got to clean the donkey.

I shall be after you.

VILLAGER *(to Canio)*

Take care, my master. He waits till you're departed, to go a-courting  
Nedda.

CANIO

You think so?

[5] Such a game, believe me, friends, is hardly worth the playing.  
Let Tonio ponder what I'm saying.

For the Stage and Life are different, you'll discover;

For if up there *(pointing to the Theatre)* I caught her - my lady,  
with a lover,

I'd preach her a little sermon, and get into a passion,

Then calmly I'd seat me there,

And let her lover beat me there,

While the people would applaud in the customary fashion!

But if Nedda - in earnest should deceive me,

The ending would be different, believe me.

Mark the words that I am saying,

Such a game, believe me, friends, is hardly worth the playing!

NEDDA

What can he mean?

VILLAGERS

But surely you cannot suspect her.

CANIO

No, no, of course not. That could not be,  
I love her and respect her.

[6] BOYS

Hark! 'Tis the bagpipes! The pipers coming.

MEN

See where the people churchward are going!

OLD PEOPLE

Hark, to the bagpipes so merrily blowing!

Gaily the couples to vespers are going!

WOMEN

Come away!

The grey twilight falleth,

The angelus calleth!

CANIO

Yes, but remember, pray,

At seven you're invited!

"BELL CHORUS"

Ding dong! The shadows fall,

Then come, one and all!

To the church come away,

Ding dong! We roam along,

In love's dream so fair.  
But mothers have watchful eyes,  
Beware! Oh beware!  
Soon in the twilight,  
Love will be told;  
But the old folks are watching,  
Be not too bold!  
Ding dong! All above,  
All around is bright with love.  
Ding dong! The shadows fall,  
Come, one and all!

## Scene 2

### [7] NEDDA

How fierce he looked and watched me!  
I hung my head, fearing lest he should discover  
My secret thoughts of my lover.  
Heav'ns! If he should suspect me,  
With all his brutal ways! No matter! I fear not,  
These are but empty dreams and idle fancies.  
O Shine, thou glorious sun, upon me!  
Every pulse is throbbing, glowing,  
Like the tide, my passion flowing,  
Oh my heart, my restless heart, where art thou going?  
Ah, ye beautiful song-birds! I hear your pinions,  
What seek ye? Whither going? Who knows?  
My mother knew the meaning of your sweet voices,  
And the song she sang me in happy childhood,  
Comes back for ever!

[8] High aloft they cry,  
Through Heaven's blue ether launched in their flight,  
Like arrows of light, in the sky.  
The storm clouds and the tempest, the sunlight defying,  
For ever flying - through the boundless sky!  
Afar, ever they journey! On, upward ever!  
Oh! Wearying never, their fetterless wings unfold,  
They have their visions, their tender beautiful visions,  
They soar for ever through clouds of gold,  
What though the wind howls, and night is dark above them,  
Spreading their pinions by planet and star,  
No night dismays them, no storm delays them,  
They soar for ever o'er sea and scar.

Far! Oh so far they fly on wings untiring,  
Seeking sweet regions they may never know,  
For what can bar their dreams and desiring?  
'Tis fate that leads them, still on they go!

*(Tonio enters)*

NEDDA

What? Thou! I thought that thou wast gone to market!  
TONIO

The fault lies in thy singing. Thy song bewitched me.  
I could not leave thee.

NEDDA (Laughing scornfully)

Ha! Ha! How very poetical.

TONIO

Do not laugh, Nedda.

NEDDA

Go to the tavern.

[9] TONIO

I know that you hate me and laugh in derision,  
For what is the Jester? He plays but a part.

Yet he has his dream, and his hope and his vision,  
The Clown has a heart.

And ah when you pass me, uncaring, unseeing,  
You know not my sorrow, so cruel and sweet,  
I give you my spirit, my life, and my being,  
I die at your feet.

Ah, hear me then, hear me then,

Let me tell thee -

NEDDA (*interrupting*)

- You love me.

'Tis time enough to tell me this evening.  
This evening when you're playing the fool,  
With sighs and grimaces,  
Why not postpone the confession till then?

TONIO

No, 'tis now I will tell it thee

And thou shalt hear me now.

I love thee, worship and long for thee,  
To make thee mine for ever.

NEDDA

Tell me, Master Tonio,

Do thy shoulders itch for a drubbing?

Or do thy ears want a rubbing?

How shall I teach thee to cool thy love?

[10] TONIO

You mock me? Too long I've borne it.  
By the cross of the Saviour, Nedda, I'll make thee pay,  
I've sworn it!

NEDDA

You threaten? Must I then call Canio?

TONIO

But not before I kiss thee!

NEDDA

Hands off!

TONIO

No! No! Thou shalt me mine.

NEDDA (striking Tonio with whip)

Unhand me, wretch!

TONIO

By the Holy Virgin of the Assumption, Nedda,

I swear it, I'll be revenged upon thee.

NEDDA

Viper, begone! Thou hast revealed thy nature as a fool. Thou hast  
a heart as foul and ugly as thy body, aye! Foulter still!

Scene 3

SILVIO

Nedda!

NEDDA

Silvio! At this hour. What madness!

SILVIO

Bah! Bah! No danger, dear, I'm thinking,

Canio I left at yonder tavern drinking.

By the pathway that we love, through the bushes I came hither.

NEDDA

A moment sooner and Tonio would have caught thee.

SILVIO

Ha! Ha! The fool?

NEDDA

The fool is to be feared. He loves me.

Just now he told me.

With burning words and brutal fire,

He tried to kiss me in his mad desire.

SILVIO

By heaven!

NEDDA

Nay be not anxious! For such a passion,

A whip is the fashion.

SILVIO

Why wilt thou live, then, for ever like this, Nedda?

[11] My fate is in thy hands,

Nedda, pity my sorrow,

Tonight the fair is o'er,

Thou wilt be gone tomorrow.

Ah what of me, when thou art departed,

How shall I live apart from thee

And broken hearted?

NEDDA

Silvio!

SILVIO

Nedda, Nedda, hear, I implore thee!

If for thy husband no passion inspires thee,

If all this roving life sickens and tires thee,

If this great love of ours is not empty delight,

Come fly with me, fly with me, dearest, tonight!

NEDDA

Ah, tempt me not! Has not life enough of sadness?

Silvio, tempt me no more. 'Tis folly, 'tis madness!

Have I not given thee my heart? Thou hast my love for aye

Then say goodbye and part. Thou wilt not then betray

Ah tempt me not for pity's sake, my heart will break!

Who knows, dear heart, 'tis best to part!

Tears are vain, all is vain; we must not meet again.

And yet remembering all our love, since first I met thee,

I shall dream of thee, live for thee, never forget thee.

SILVIO

No! You do not love me!

TONIO (*watching*)

I've caught thee, thou traitress!

NEDDA

I love thee, love thee!

SILVIO

And yet you leave me tomorrow.

[12] Why hast thou taught me love's magic story,

If thou wilt leave me, hopeless alone?

Why press to mine thy lips in their glory,

Why fold thy heart unto mine own?

If thou forgettest all our caresses,

Remember I still that dream divine,  
I want thy heart, thy passionate kisses,  
I want thy spirit to melt in mine!  
NEDDA  
Can I forget, as I see thee before me,  
The spell of love thy heart has woven o'er me?  
By the words thou hast spoken, the ties that have bound me  
All I want is thy love, folded around me.  
Ah, do not leave me! Wherefore must we never?  
Thou hast my heart, and I am thine for ever!  
SILVIO/NEDDA  
Forget the past, think not of tomorrow!  
NEDDA  
Look in mine eyes, and kiss away my sorrow.  
SILVIO  
In thy eyes, dear, I kiss away my sorrow.  
SILVIO  
Wilt come?  
NEDDA  
Yes! Take me, love!  
[13] TONIO (*to Canio*)  
Tread lightly, lightly, and you will catch them so!  
SILVIO  
At midnight, dearest, I wait thee below!  
Come to me, dearest, when the starbeams shine.  
NEDDA  
Tonight, and for ever, I am thine!  
CANIO (*overhearing*)  
Ha!  
NEDDA (*to Silvio*)  
Fly!  
NEDDA  
Ah, Heav'n protect him now!  
CANIO  
Coward! Where art thou?  
TONIO (*laughing*)  
Ha! Ha!  
NEDDA (*to Tonio*)  
Well done, well done then, Tonio  
TONIO  
Yes - yes I did it.  
NEDDA  
Just like you, you coward!

TONIO  
Next time, I expect to do better!  
NEDDA  
You make me hate and loathe you.  
TONIO  
Love me, or hate me! 'Tis nought to me.  
CANIO  
So again she's fooled me. Baffled again!  
He knows this path too well. But no matter.  
This moment you shall tell me your lover's name.  
NEDDA  
Who?  
CANIO  
You, by Heav'n eternal!  
And if here now this moment, I do not slice you dead  
(*drawing dagger*)  
'Tis because before I kill thee, and thy blood stains my dagger,  
Thou shameless woman, thou shalt tell me  
Who is thy lover. Tell me!  
NEDDA  
Vain are thine insults. My lips are sealed for ever.  
CANIO  
His name, I tell thee. This moment, thou shalt tell me.  
NEDDA  
No! No! Never will I tell thee.  
CANIO  
By Heav'n, I'll kill thee.  
(*Peppe, entering, snatches dagger from Canio*)  
[14] PEPPE  
Ah stay, good master, for the love of Heav'n,  
The people! See! They're coming.  
Look, where they come from church, to see us play,  
Come away. Be calm, I pray.  
CANIO  
Leave me, I tell thee. His name, then, his name!  
PEPPE  
Tonio, come here and hold him,  
The people come this way. Don't let them see you.  
And Nedda, you go hence, I pray.  
Go hence and dress yourself.  
You know well, Canio is hasty but tender.  
CANIO  
'Tis shameful, shameful!

TONIO (*to Canio*)

Ah! Calm yourself, my master. 'Tis best to make believe!

The lover will return, I am convinced of it.

Trust me to watch her. Now is the time the play began.

Who knows? Haply the lover will be here tonight,

And will betray it. Come then, we must dissemble

If we would win.

PEPPE (*to Canio*)

Come, come, go dress yourself, I pray you

(*to Tonio*)

And you play up your drum there, Tonio!

CANIO

To act, with my heart maddened with sorrow,

I know not what I am saying or what I am doing.

Yet I must face it. Courage, my heart!

Thou art not a man! Thou'rt Punchinello!

[15] On with the motley and the paint and the powder,

The people pay thee, and want their laugh you know.

If Harlequin thy Columbine has stolen,

Laugh, Punchinello! The world will cry "Bravo!"

Go hide with laughter thy tears and thy sorrow,

Sing, and be merry, playing thy part,

Laugh, Punchinello, for the love that is ended,

Laugh, for the pain that is breaking thy heart.

[16] Intermezzo

Act 2, Scene 1 (Scene as in Act 1)

[17] WOMEN (*arriving*)

Quickly, sweet gossips, come,

The show's beginning.

Hark how they beat the drum,

Oh, what a dinning!

Come quickly, come, I say,

Let's get good places.

TONIO

Walk up and see the play,

All take your places.

SILVIO

Nedda!

NEDDA

Be careful,

He has not seen us!

SILVIO

Tonight, remember, love!

I shall be there!

PEOPLE

Now then, begin the play,

Have done your prating!

Why keep us waiting?

Begin, I say!

Time to begin!

Let's make a din!

It's seven o'clock that's certain!

Ring up the curtain!

Silence, you there!

Begin! Begin!

Act 2, Scene 2 – The Play

[18] COLUMBINE

My husband Punchinello

Comes not till morning; nobody's about.

Taddeo's at the market - lazy fellow!

All is safe, all is quite safe.

HARLEQUIN (*outside*)

O, Columbine, unbar to me

Thy lattice high,

I watch and sigh,

Longing to hear thee,

And be near thee, as the hours go by.

O, show thy little face to me,

So dear, thou art,

Thou hast my heart,

Ah, do not vex me,

Tease and perplex me, how can I live

Without thy loving heart?

O, Columbine, then list to me,

Thy door unbar,

Come down, my star!

Look down above me, Come down, and love me,

See, where alone I sigh!

For if thou lov'st me not,

Let me die!

[19] COLUMBINE

Ah yes! 'Tis now the hour entrancing!

The moment's advancing!  
And Harlequin is waiting there!  
TADDEO  
Behold her! Ah! How surpassing fair!  
Ah, just to tell her, rebellious maiden,  
Just to tell her the love with which I'm laden!  
All safe and clear, now!  
No husband near now!  
Why should I fear now?  
There's no one to suspect me.  
Come, Love! Direct me!  
COLUMBINE  
Well, fool? Is't thou?  
TADDEO  
Yes, 'tis I.  
COLUMBINE  
Hast thou seen Punchinello?  
TADDEO  
He went just now.  
COLUMBINE  
Come then, what were you sent for?  
Where is the fowl you went for?  
TADDEO  
Low at thy feet it is lying.  
See us both. Ah! I implore thee  
Luckless couple here before me!  
O, Columbine - be mine, be mine!  
Hear, O, maiden tender!  
From the day -  
COLUMBINE  
How much, I say?  
Your reck'ning render!  
TADDEO  
(Just one and threepence!) - Hear me say  
How I love thee and adore thee!  
COLUMBINE  
Get away, get away!  
[20] TADDEO (*to Columbine*)  
Pure! Yes, I know thou art,  
Pure as the snow flake falling,  
Why wilt thou close thy heart  
Unto my calling? Dearest, say,  
Must I leave thee and forsake thee?

HARLEQUIN  
Yes, or I'll make thee!  
TADDEO (*to Harlequin*)  
What! You love her!  
Then I must hand her over!  
My blessing for you!  
Yonder shall I watch o'er you!  
COLUMBINE  
Harlequin!  
HARLEQUIN  
My Columbine! Ah, how we've prayed, dear,  
And Love has heard our prayer.  
COLUMBINE  
The supper's laid, dear!  
See here, see here, my dearest dear,  
The supper that I've bought thee!  
HARLEQUIN  
Observe, my love, my dainty dove,  
The splendid wine I've brought thee!  
BOTH  
For love is very fond of wine,  
And partial to the kitchen  
HARLEQUIN  
My greedy little Columbine!  
COLUMBINE  
My toper most bewitchin'!  
HARLEQUIN (*taking a phial from his breast*)  
Take then this little philtre fine,  
Give it to thy husband,  
Pour it in his wine,  
And then let's fly, my dear!  
COLUMBINE  
Yes - give it to me!  
TADDEO  
Beware! Thy husband is here!  
For weapons seeking, with anger stamping,  
All's discovered! I'd better be decamping.  
COLUMBINE (*to Harlequin*)  
Fly, then.  
[21] HARLEQUIN (*as he enters*)  
Here's the philtre. Pour it in his wine, love!  
COLUMBINE  
Tonight, and for ever, I shall be thine, love!



CANIO  
God! Am I dreaming? What she said this morning  
But courage! Some one was here with you!  
NEDDA  
What nonsense! You've been drinking!  
CANIO  
- Been drinking!.....Yes, I think so!  
NEDDA  
You're back too early.  
CANIO  
In time though! Thou fearest!  
Art thou sorry, my sweetest, my dearest?  
Ah nay, thou wast not lonely.  
Who has been with thee here?  
NEDDA  
The Fool Taddeo - only!  
In fact, he's in the cupboard, hiding!  
Come out!.....explain!  
TONIO  
Believe me, sir, thy wife is true. She'd never grieve thee!  
Those pious lips of hers would ne'er deceive thee.  
CANIO  
Traitor! False woman,  
Dost thou forget that I am also human?  
Tell me his name!  
NEDDA  
Whose name?  
CANIO  
Tell me then, by God who made me,  
Within whose shameless arms thou hast betrayed me?  
NEDDA  
Punchinello! Punchinello!  
[22] CANIO  
No! Punchinello no more! I am a man again,  
With aching heart and anguish deep and human,  
Calling for vengeance, for blood to wash away the stain,  
Thy foul dishonour, thou shameless woman!  
No! Punchinello no more! Fool that I sheltered thee!  
And made thee mine by every tender token!  
Of the love that I gave thee, what is there left to me?  
What have I now, but a heart that is broken?  
WOMEN  
Sweet gossip, ah, it makes me weep,

So true it all is seeming.  
MEN  
Silence down there, quiet keep.  
SILVIO  
Ah, can it be I'm dreaming.  
CANIO  
I hoped, in my passion so blindly confiding,  
If not for love, for pity sweet,  
I loved thee more than God in heav'n abiding,  
All my life and my being, I laid at thy faithless feet!  
I dreamt thou wast true! I would I ne'er had met thee!  
I thought of thee pure and stainless as the morn,  
Thou hast broken my heart, I live but to forget thee.  
Thou hast my love, but now thou hast my hate and scorn!  
AUDIENCE  
Bravo!  
[23] NEDDA  
Well, then, if you deemest me so unworthy,  
Come, let me go and leave thee.  
CANIO  
No doubt! No doubt! And set thee free,  
And let thy lover's arms receive thee!  
No! Thou shalt remain, I swear it.  
I want thy lover's name - Come then - declare it!  
NEDDA  
I never knew that you, my dear,  
Were such a tragic fellow,  
You here will see no tragedy,  
My dearest Punchinello!  
The man who's been to sup with me,  
And caused you all this bother,  
Was only Harlequin you see,  
Poor Harlequin, no other!  
CANIO  
Ah! Dost thou mock me? My rage thou still defiest.  
Say who's thy lover - this moment - or thou diest!  
NEDDA  
No! By my mother's soul, unworthy though thou call me,  
I will not tell thee, whatever fate befall me!  
VOICES IN THE CROWD  
Are they in earnest? What are they doing?  
PEPPE  
Let us be going, Tonio!

TONIO  
Silence, fool!  
PEPPE  
I am afraid!  
SILVIO  
Oh, the play is a strange one,  
I can bear it no more!  
NEDDA  
For thine anger I care not. Love is a weapon stronger!  
Thus I defy thee! I fear thee no longer!  
CANIO  
His name! His name!  
NEDDA  
No!  
SILVIO  
What in the devil's name?.....He's in earnest!

CANIO (*stabbing Nedda*)  
Take that, and that!  
In thy last dying agony thou'lt tell!  
VOICES IN AUDIENCE  
Stop him!  
NEDDA  
Help me, Silvio!  
SILVIO  
Nedda!  
CANIO (*to Silvio, as he stabs him*)  
So! 'Twas you then! 'Tis well!  
MEN  
Help! Help! Arrest him!  
WOMEN  
Father of pity!  
CANIO  
The comedy is ended.

CURTAIN

## THE PLAYERS:

The British National Opera Company (BNOC) emerged from the collapse of the Beecham Opera Company which ceased its operations in December 1920. In its short existence from the first performance (*Aida* in Bradford on 6 February 1922) to the last (*Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci* in Golders Green, London, on 16 April 1929), BNOC made an important impact on the operatic establishment of the day. After initial refusals, the Grand Opera Syndicate, who were lessees of Covent Garden, allowed BNOC to perform there. The season opened with Miriam Licette as Mimi. BNOC provided varied seasons at the Opera House from 1922 to 1924 inclusive before moving to His Majesty's Theatre. The change of venue was necessitated by the fact that, despite the satisfactory box office receipts and favourable press, the Syndicate decided to resume the old summer seasons.

In their short stay at Covent Garden, BNOC achieved a notable first. The matinee performance of *Hansel and Gretel*, with Maggie Teyte as Hansel, on 6 January 1923, was the first broadcast in Europe of a complete opera (Though one source, *Music Masterpieces* magazine, claims that only two acts were broadcast, and the accolade belongs to *Pagliacci*, broadcast the following day). As a mark of the prestige which BNOC earned, several operatic celebrities were prepared to perform with the company. Dame Nellie Melba, Joseph Hislop, Edward Johnson and Dinh Gilly all appeared during the company's London seasons. Most of the company's activities involved touring in the provinces and it was not afraid to introduce new and adventurous repertoire. Obviously it championed contemporary British operas, such as Holst's *At the Boar's Head* and *The Perfect Fool*, and Vaughan Williams' *Hugh the Drover*. It even produced *Pelleas and Melisande* in English, featuring Maggie Teyte who had studied the rôle with Debussy.

BNOC's first artistic director was Percy Pitt, who relinquished the post in 1924. Pitt had been music director with the Grand Opera Syndicate and went on to work at the BBC. His successor was Frederic Austin, a baritone who in 1920 arranged the music for a revival of *The Beggar's Opera* at Hammersmith, which was very successful. The Board of BNOC included several famous musicians of the time: Norman Allin the bass, conductor Aylmer Buesst, Walter Hyde, tenor, Percy Pitt, Robert Radford the bass, and Agnes Nicholls, soprano and wife of Sir Hamilton Harty. A new generation of British singers and conductors began their careers with BNOC but like so many similar ventures BNOC failed for financial reasons. Essentially, a tax demand for £17,000 led to the company going into voluntary liquidation. The Royal Opera House stepped in and for three years it existed as the Covent Garden English Opera Company.

The fact that back in 1927, Columbia decided to make complete recordings of both "Cav" and "Pag" must be a testament to the popularity of BNOC. Eighty years ago complete opera recordings were a rarity though with the advent of electric recording the number began to rise. The singers on these recordings were all BNOC stalwarts, and five in particular Miriam Licette, Heddle Nash, Frank Mullings, Harold Williams and Dennis Noble, left fairly large recorded legacies.

**Miriam Licette** (1892-1969) studied with such luminaries as Mathilde Marchesi (with whom Melba studied for a year), Jean de Reszke and Sabbatini (who also taught John McCormack). Unusually for a British singer of this era, Licette made her début in Rome before she was 20. Like many of her contemporaries, she was a member of both the Beecham company and BNOC before appearing in her own right in major roles at the International Seasons at Covent Garden. She appeared as, among other characters, Cio-Cio-

San (sharing the rôle with Toti dal Monte and Rosetta Pampanini in separate seasons), Desdemona (opposite Renato Zanelli's Otello), Donna Elvira (in a cast that included Elisabeth Schumann and Mariano Stabile) and Eurydice (opposite Dame Clara Butt's only Covent Garden appearance, as Orfeo). In addition to a large number of separate recordings of arias and ensembles, Licette sang Marguerite in the complete recording of *Faust* under Beecham, as well as substantial extracts from *Maritana*. All her recordings show a pure, even and musical soprano although occasionally her English pronunciation is very much of the era.

**Heddle Nash** (1896-1961), like Licette, made his début in Italy after studying in Milan with Giuseppe Borghatti, who became Italy's leading *heldentenor* of his day. Nash sang at the Old Vic, Sadler's Wells and with the BNOC before also singing as a freelance artist at Covent Garden. His repertoire ranged from Rodolfo in *La Bohème* to Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* and an incomparable David in *Die Meistersinger*. Nash sang at the inaugural Glyndebourne seasons and he was the leading oratorio tenor of his age. His complete recording of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* is the touchstone by which others are judged. He sang Faust in the first Beecham recording as well as Act IV of *La Bohème* under the same conductor.

**Frank Mullings** (1881-1953) was another leading singer with both Beecham and BNOC. His repertoire included Tristan, Radames and Otello. It is often difficult to reconcile Mullings' reputation, based upon reading contemporary reviews, with the recorded evidence, as he sings with a commitment for which the fragile recording apparatus was ill-equipped. The timbre of his voice seems not to have been sympathetic to the early microphones [*though the Columbia engineers on this recording did a very good job*] but, perhaps more importantly, Mullings' recordings suffer more than

most by being played at the wrong speed (Columbia records of this age played at 80, not 78, rpm). The discerning critic Neville Cardus, who came to know Mullings well when Mullings joined the teaching staff at the Royal Manchester College of Music in 1944, wrote earlier that "Mr. Mullings acted Canio in *Pagliacci* far beyond the plane of conventional Italian opera of the blood and sand order. His singing is not exactly all honey, but how intensely he lived in the part! He almost persuades us that there is real tragedy about that if the puppet Parry were pricked, blood and not sawdust would come forth."

**Harold Williams** (1893-1976) was born in Sydney and moved to England to further his training and career opportunities. He excelled as a recitalist and an oratorio performer as well as appearing in opera. His operatic roles ranged from Wolfram in *Tannhäuser* to Iago in *Otello*, to the title rôle in *Boris Godunov*. His notable interpretation of Elijah can be heard in two complete recordings made 17 years apart (the earlier of which is available on Divine Art Historic Sound 27802). He was not afraid to sing in contemporary works – Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* for example. He returned to his native Australia from 1940 to 1946 and again in the early 1950s. He later taught at the New South Wales State Conservatorium of Music.

**May Blyth** returned to her alma mater and was Professor of Singing at the Royal Academy of Music in her native London, after her retirement from performing. She appeared in all of the BNOC seasons at Covent Garden and appeared extensively in concerts and broadcasts. She was married to the conductor Aylmer Buesst.

**Marjorie Parry** was also married to a conductor: she was Mrs John Barbirolli from 1932 to 1936. she was born in Bristol and, by current standards, her vocal training was brief

to say the least. She studied for a year at the Royal Academy of Music before having private lessons from a professor at the Royal College of Music. She auditioned for BNOC and was given a place in the chorus. Luck played a part and in her second season she was brought out of the chorus to sing Lauretta in *Gianni Schicchi*. She quickly graduated to Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* and Alice Ford in *Falstaff*. She was an acclaimed Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier* and although we hear much these days about young opera singers doing too much too soon, so that their careers end prematurely, the management at Covent Garden placed extraordinary demands on Parry. She was required to sing on tour five performances each two weeks, and to have no less than fourteen roles: Eva, Elsa, Alice Ford, Lola, Rosalinda, Octavian, Musetta, Jack (*The Wreckers*), Nedda, Liu, Marguerite, Leonora (*Il Trovatore*), Gerhilde (*Die Walküre*) and a Flower Maiden.

**Dennis Noble** (1899-1966) was another native of Bristol. His singing began in the British cathedral tradition and after service in the First World War he was heard by Percy Pitt who auditioned him for Covent Garden, where he made his début as Marullo (*Rigoletto*) in 1924. He sang regularly at Covent Garden until the theatre closed at the outbreak of the Second World War. There, he created the roles of Sam Weller in Albert Coates' *Pickwick*, Anchor in *Judith* and Don Jose in *Don Juan de Manara*, the last two by Goossens. He sang with the Carl Rosa Company as well as with BNOC. Like many of his generation he led a lucrative and busy career as a concert and oratorio singer, opportunities which are no longer available to the same extent to the modern generation of singers. His recorded legacy is large and all his records are marked by immediate characterisation and crystal clear diction.

Information on **Justine Griffiths** has eluded me. She is not listed as a principal in Harold Rosenthal's "Two Centuries

of Opera at Covent Garden". She may however have joined BNOC after it left Covent Garden, or perhaps she was specially promoted from the chorus for this recording. She did record (1935-1926) for the small Beltona record label but she is not mentioned in any of the standard reference books nor any of the biographies or autobiographies of musicians who had connections with BNOC.

**Aylmer Buesst** (1883-1970) was born in Melbourne. He worked with the Moody-Manners Company a touring company founded by the husband and wife team of Charles Manners and Fanny Moody before joining the Beecham company. He was one of the founders of the BNOC and he wrote a concise and lucid analysis of Wagner's *Ring* which is well worth reading.

**Eugene Goossens** (1867-1958) must not be confused either with his father or his son, both also called Eugene. He was chief conductor with the Burns-Crotty, Arthur Rouseby and Moody-Manners companies which existed before the First World War. He was also chief conductor for the Carl Rosa Company from 1899 to 1915 before joining Beecham's company. It was his son who composed the operas in which Noble created roles. Goossens made a few recordings by the acoustic process but his crowning glory was undoubtedly this *Pagliacci* which was recorded in the Scala Theatre in March 1927. Hermann Klein's review in *The Gramophone* was ecstatic: "It is not a reproduction but the thing itself. Perfect in every detail... the singing... touches and maintains the high level associated with (the singer's) art at its best. Yet I would fain reserve my warmest tribute for a quarter where I am as a rule least able to bestow it I mean the orchestra. Mr. Goossens must have taken enormous pains to secure such a clear, vivid and crisp yet refined rendering of Leoncavallo's clever instrumentation. Exquisitely balanced and always sufficiently audible, it

imparts the requisite solidity of tonal foundation to the whole performance."

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