



The Complete Olympia Boronat

COMPLETE TRACK LISTING

LINER NOTES

For the first time, the complete and rare recordings of Olympia Boronat (b. 1867 - d. 1934) have been gathered to create a single CD that brings to light one of the most beautiful coloratura soprano voices on disc.



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Olimpia Boronat

Track Listing

Total timing (72:08)

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Gramophone and Typewriter Company, St. Petersburg, 1904

1. **LA TRAVIATA: Sempre libera** (Verdi) [3:05]
(1769L) 53346 / Transposed down a semi-tone to G
2. **Solovei [The Nightingale]** (Alabiev) [3:39]
(1770L) 23420 / Transposed down a full tone to C minor
3. **Senza l'amore** (Tosti) [3:05]
(1771L) 53347
4. **RIGOLETTO: Caro nome** (Verdi) [3:34]
(1772L) 53348 / Transposed down a semi-tone to E-flat
5. **MIREILLE: O d'amor messaggera** (Gounod) [2:37]
(1773L) 53349
6. **ZABAVA PUTIATISHNA: [Zabava's arioso]** (Ivanov) [2:48]
(1774L) 53350
7. **I PURITANI: O rendetemi la speme...Qui la voce sua soave** (Bellini) [3:34]
(1775L) 53351
8. **Desiderio** (Zardo) [2:27]
(1776L) 53352
9. **LES PÊCHEURS DE PERLES: Siccome un di caduto il sole** (Bizet) [3:36]
(1777L) 53353
10. **MARTHA: Qui sola, vergin rosa** (Flotow) [2:50]
(1778L) 53354
- Gramophone Company (Pre-dog), Milan, 1908
11. **I PURITANI: O rendetemi la speme...Qui la voce sua soave** (Bellini) [4:07]
(1505C) , assigned 053282, published only as HMB 20

12. **DON PASQUALE: So anch'io la virtù magica** (Donizetti) [4:22]
(1506HC) 053185
13. **RIGOLETTO: Tutte le feste** (Verdi) [3:23]
(1507C) 053186
14. **MARTHA: Qui sola, vergin rosa** (Flotow) [4:17]
(1515C), assigned 053288, published only as HMB 29
15. **LES HUGUENOTS: O vago suol** (Meyerbeer) [4:09]
16. **LES HUGUENOTS: La tenera parola** (Meyerbeer)
[2:30]
(1516C) Unpublished, published only as HMB 29
(1517C) 053187
17. **LA SONNAMBULA: Come per me sereno** (Bellini)
[4:08]
(1520HC) 053188
18. **OLGA: E lo sapevi** (Giannelli) [3:22]
(1542C) 053189
19. **Solovei [The Nightingale]** (Alabiev) [3:14]
(1543HC) 023041 / Transposed down a full tone to C
minor
20. **Ave Maria** (Bach-Gounod) [2:51]
(1544C) 053190
21. **Ave Maria** (Bach-Gounod) [2:59]
(1544HC) 053190X

Languages: Italian [1, and 3-18]; Russian [2 and 19] and Latin [20 and 21]

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 [17, 18 and 20]

Photographs: Girvice Archer and Roger Gross Ltd.

Producer and Audio Conservation: Ward Marston

Booklet Design: Takeshi Takahashi

Marston would like to thank Harry Butler, Victor Girard, and Lawrence F. Holdridge for their help in the production of this CD release.



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Olimpia Boronat

Liner Notes

The lyric coloratura soprano Olimpia Boronat made comparatively few records yet they have always been much admired, and deservedly so, though her career was not the stuff legends are made of. She never appeared at any of those internationally famous opera houses, like New York's Metropolitan, London's Covent Garden, Milan's La Scala, the Vienna Staatsoper, the Paris Opéra or the Buenos Aires' Colón. As with other Italians before the First World War, like the tenor Angelo Masini and the baritone Mattia Battistini, it was in imperial Russia that she spent her best years. As a result of her experience there, her art harks back to an earlier era.

From the beginning, details of her life and career are neither plentiful nor precise. The year of her birth offered by two generally reliable authorities is different; Kutsch and Riemen's *Unvergängliche Stimmen* states 1867, but Roberto Bauer's *Historical Records* states 1859; neither gives the date nor month. Desmond Shawe-Taylor, in notes to an HMV-Angel record album [COLH 129], 'Singers of Imperial Russia', claims her father was an Italian army officer and her mother a Spaniard, yet the consonantal ending of her name suggests their nationalities were the other way about.

Born in Genoa, she was heard as a child by the Queen Mother of Italy, who was most impressed and made arrangements for her to study at the Milan Conservatory under Pietro Leoni. Her debut took place in Naples either in 1885 or 86, but not at the San Carlo; Carlo Rosconi, in *Il Teatro di San Carlo, La Chronologia [1737-1987]*, does not include her in either year's 'cartellone'.

In the first few years of her career she sang around Central and South America. In 1891, after appearances in Italy and Egypt (where a large number of Italians then lived), she proceeded to St. Petersburg as guest at the Mariinsky Theatre, following it with engagements in Moscow, Kiev and Warsaw. The next we learn of her is of her marriage to a Pole, Count Rzewuski (until 1918 Poland was part of imperial Russia). According to one authority the marriage took place in 1893, another states 1902. Whichever is correct, in those days, a marriage into the nobility would have brought the

curtain down on her career. If the marriage took place in 1893, it would have lasted only a couple of years; if it did not take place until 1902, and in 1904 she made her first records for the G & T company in St. Petersburg, then she was only retired a couple of years. Her singing certainly sounds fluent, so the second date seems more likely. Four years later she came again for another session. She retired in 1914, and after World War I moved to Warsaw where she opened a school for singing.

By the last quarter of the 19th century the soprano repertory had separated into basically three subdivisions. There were those like Boronat, who preferred Patti's older florid repertory (Patti sang so long that terms like 'coloratura soprano' and 'bel canto' first came to be used to describe her voice and her singing); those who specialised in the newer lyric repertory, like Marguerite in *Faust*, Micaëla in *Carmen* and Mimì in *La Bohème*; those lyric dramatic sopranos first demanded by Wagner who sang Isolde, Brünnhilde and Kundry and only later, with the increased demands of verismo, crossed-over into Italian opera, as *La Gioconda*, *Manon Lescaut* and *Tosca*.

By then it was no longer singers who contributed to the charting out of new paths, as they had when Bellini secured Giuditta Pasta's advice when composing *Norma*. It was as much as they could do to find their own way; composers were too preoccupied with the orchestra to be concerned with the voice's limitations. Boronat expressed distaste for what was then modern music. Although admitting that the works of Wagner, Debussy and Mascagni were interesting, yet she insisted, they were not music—at least, not by her standards. In western Europe new roles were still being added to the repertory, and she found it easier in Russia to keep aloof from such experiments. On her records there are few traces of those less attractive features Italian lyric coloraturas took to increasingly in the age of verismo—the tone driven against the hard palate, the open, edgy quality in the upper range. She still sang the established classics, and they set the best example.

After another generation had passed in this century we note on their records how Italian lyric coloraturas, like Toti dal Monte, Adelaide Saraceni and Nunù Sanchioni, were obliged to hold on tightly—literally. They came to produce a disagreeable steam-whistle scream, under threat from the big guns, the lyric dramatic sopranos, the Mazzolenis, the Poli-Randaccios, the Cignas and the Caniglias. Only finally in the days of Renata Scotto did their characteristically imprecise execution come to be abandoned. By the second

half of this century verismo was long dead, Callas had reintroduced 'bel canto,' reeducating the public's ears, singers had to sing the music accurately, and were obliged to refine their techniques. There was no place any longer for the 'squillante' tone.

On Boronat's records we can still hear many of the pre-verismo felicities. In *La Traviata* 'Sempre libera', which she transposes down from A-flat into G, she observes a number of typical ritards in free style, though she employs them chastely and does not overdo them. She separates the top Bs then, before 'a diletti sempre nuovi', carries the run down and links the phrases—in her day singers were expected to introduce effects that graced the music. Violetta was a favourite Boronat role, she sang it in 1910 on a visit to the San Carlo, Naples.

In Amina's 'Come per me sereno', from Bellini's *La Sonnambula*, she shows considerable technical refinement as well as, something too, we may believe, of the music's original style—almost a sense of improvisation, the line exquisitely graced, a trill accurately and neatly turned. We note too those lengthy morendos and high pianissimi, and a partiality for the messa di voce that recalls Fernando de Lucia; like him too—though she is less provincial and less self-indulgent, she makes out of them something beautiful in themselves. In another Bellini piece, Elvira's Mad Scene from *I Puritani*, there is the same stylish delivery, the words uttered clearly and affectingly and set in lovely tone.

What perhaps most distinguishes her singing is its charm. Nowhere more so than in Norina's aria, 'Son anch'io' from *Don Pasquale*, a piece many pretty young soubrettes make a feint at, but few have a just appreciation of the right style. Her interpretation is an education, both technically and musically—the voice rhythmically responsive, the repeated grace notes executed limpidly, so the accent is on the note, and not, as we too often hear, on the grace; the interpolated turns in the phrase 'ma in riso lo sdegno fu presto in cangiar', each note justly proportionate; and the neat accurately turned cadenza, before 'D'un breve sorrisetto' where the score demands one. Her Norina is no shrill shrew; she shows just how affecting this music can sound.

In her day music had not yet separated into pop and classics; like many opera singers busy long before the microphone, there is nothing self-consciously arty about any of her interpretations. She sings everything, whether Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, Tosti or Alabiev, with the same scrupulous commitment. The point Hanslick makes about Patti might as well have been written of her. 'She was capable of offering an

utterly individual pleasure almost independent of the composition at hand.' We hear this in her recordings of Tosti's 'Senza l'amore' and Zardo's 'Desiderio'. Not great music, perhaps, echoes of the 'Salotto Umbertino', but her singing has an evocative fragrance redolent of times now long ago vanished.

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Editorial note:

Russian baritone, Sergej Jurevich Levik (born 1883, debut Kiev 1908), left us perhaps a unique account of Boronat in his autobiography *Zapiski Opernogo Pevca* [Memoirs of an Opera Singer], Iskusstvo, Moscow, 1955.

"One summer at the Château-de-Fleurs the Italians presented *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with Olimpia Boronat in the rôle of Rosina. A remarkable singer, she was, as distinguished wife of Count Rewuski, one of the landed gentry in Kiev province and enjoyed a comfortable life both in Kiev as well as on her own estate. Like many other Italian singers, she had in her repertory a few concert numbers in mutilated Russian.... First place among them was, of course, Aljabev's "Nightingale" which she often sang in Rosina's singing lesson scene.

"The audience demanded "Nightingale" and she always gave them what they wanted. Without further ado, she walked to the wings and, in a charming, clear voice, asked the director to go fetch the sheet music to "Nightingale, My Nightingale" from her dressing room. There was a pause of some long three minutes, in the course of which she, with a coquettish smile on her lips, addressed the audience two or three times with a reassuring "uno momento." When her music was brought to her, she waved the sheets at the audience, ran to the piano, put the music down before Don Alonso and turning to her public said, "Karosho, pravda? [*Very good, right?* in "mutilated" Russian as represented by Levik.]

"Did she give any thought to character, to theatrical performance or trouble herself with the realism of the play as a whole? No, you see, Olimpia Boronat was one of the very best of singers, possessing a bewitching voice, great musicality and all the resources of Italian bel canto; but this singer wanted nothing more than to increase her success by ingratiating her public!"

[Translation: Victor Girard]