

CILEA Adriana Lecouvreur • Mario Rossi, cond; Magda Olivero (Adriana Lecouvreur); Giulietta Simionato (La Principessa di Bouillon); Franco Corelli (Maurizio); Ettore Bastianini (Michonnet); Teatro San Carlo Naples Ch & O • IMMORTAL PERFORMANCES 1111/1–2 mono (2 CDs: 142:49) Live: Naples 11/28/1959

MASCAGNI Iris • Olivero de Fabritiis, cond; Magda Olivero (Iris); Salvatore Puma (Osaka); Saturno Meletti (Kyoto); Giulio Neri (Il Cieco); RAI Turin Ch & O • IMMORTAL PERFORMANCES 1111/3–4 mono (2 CDs: 156:05) Live: Turin 9/6/1956

& PUCCINI Manon Lescaut: In quelle trine morbide; Sola perduto abbandonata (Fulvio Vernizzi, Netherlands RS, 10/31/1966). La rondine: Che il bel sogno (Anton Kerjes, unidentified O, 3/5/1972). ALFANO Risurrezione: Dio pietoso (Elio Boncompagni, RAI Turin O, 1/30/1973). CATALANI Loreley: Amor celeste ebbrezza (Arturo Basile, RAI Turin O, 5/6/1953)

VERDI La traviata: Act I, É strano....Ah, fors'è lui....Sempre libera; Magda Olivero, Muzio Giovagnoli, tenor, Ugo Tansini, cond.; RAI Turin O, 1940.

Act II, Scene 1: Magda Olivero; Aldo Protti, (Giorgio Germont). Live, Orchestra Radio Netherlands, Fulvio Vernizzi, cond., 6 May 1967.

Act II – Amami Alfredo! Magda Olivero; Ugo Tansini cond., 6 May 1953 (Cetra AT 0320)

Act III Complete • Fulvio Vernizzi, cond; Magda Olivero (Violetta); Doro Antonioli (Alfredo Germont); Aldo Protti (Giorgio Germont). Live, Orchestra Radio Netherlands, 6 May 1967.

& PUCCINI Tosca: Vissi d'arte (Ugo Tansini, RAI Turin O, 1940). La bohème: Addio....Donde lieta usci (Fulvio Vernizzi, Netherlands RS, 3/2/1968). Madama Butterfly: Ancora un passo; Un bel di vedremo (Fulvio Vernizzi, Netherlands RS, 3/2/1968 and 12/14/1968)

By James Altena

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The remarkably long-lived Magda Olivero (1910–2014)—who, incredibly and like the magnificent Russian basso Mark Reizen, sang when in her 90s—is the rare singer for whom an adjective such as “fabled” never grows

stale. While recording companies shockingly neglected her, surviving live performances are avidly collected by vocal *cognoscenti*. In one of the treasured miracles and memories of my own life, I actually saw her onstage in *Tosca* (with Pavarotti and Cornell MacNeil), when the Met came on tour to Detroit in May 1979. I was just 20 years old, and it was only the second opera performance I'd ever seen in my life (the first was *Boris Godunov* with Jerome Hines, when the Met came on tour to Detroit in 1978). The entire performance, but especially Olivero as *Tosca*, remains etched in my memory to this day. (The Dallas performance from a couple of weeks later in the same tour has been issued in fine sound by Ponto; it's the only recording of the opera I've heard that can completely withstand comparison with Callas/di Stefano/Gobbi/de Sabata.) I didn't really know who she was then, but I certainly do now.

This set—with five discs selling for the price of four—is a superlative tribute to Olivero's artistry. Devotees of historic opera performances likely need no introduction to this performance of *Adriana Lecouvreur*. It is an instance in which "legendary" hardly begins to describe what indisputably ranks among the 10 greatest live opera performances preserved on recordings—indeed, among the 10 greatest recorded opera performances, period, in my estimation. The back story to it—which I had not known before reading the superbly detailed and informative booklet essays by Stephen Hastings and Richard Caniell—makes this even more incredible. Renata Tebaldi cancelled out of the performance due to illness only an hour before curtain time. A frantic plea was issued to Olivero, who was convalescing from a recent operation in a nearby hospital, to rescue the evening. She arose from her sickbed and went on stage with absolutely no rehearsal to deliver the performance of a lifetime. It is a tribute to her astounding professionalism that she could not only assume the role under such conditions, but fit in seamlessly as if she had been involved in the production from its inception.

As Olivero matured, her voice greatly changed character, from the light soprano with an extremely rapid, almost tremulous vibrato in her 1938 studio recording of Liù in *Turandot* to a far more dramatic *verismo* instrument that in many ways resembled Maria Callas but without the latter's upper register lacunae. Also like Callas, Olivero had the supreme ability of being able totally to inhabit a character and bring her to life with searing emotional intensity. In the latter years of her career, her voice developed a distinctive harshness and edge, which she intelligently and effectively turned to advantage to portray heroines in extreme degrees of emotional distress. *Adriana* was a role with which Olivero had a special

identification—the dying composer persuaded her to end her original premature retirement in the 1940s with a personal plea for her to undertake the role one more time, though unfortunately he died two months before the revival was staged in January 1951—and here she is heard to the full height of her incredible interpretive powers. Although her voice lacks conventional beauty, her entrance aria “Io son l’umile ancella” is absolutely enthralling in expressive inflection of the line and floating of *pianissimos*; the audience understandably brings the performance temporarily to a complete halt with a vociferous ovation. From then on, unbelievably, it is all uphill and not down, with one artistic revelation after another leaving the listener positively slack-jawed in stupefaction. Incredibly the capstone occurs not with an aria, but in her spoken recitative of the scene from Racine’s *Phrèdre*; for many years this has been the first excerpt I have played for neophytes to historic recordings to demonstrate the gripping power of live performances. Her closing aria “Poveri fiori” is no let-down from this pinnacle, but a supreme outpouring of broken-hearted loss and resignation that moves one to join Adriana in her sorrow. If there is any more intense and probing characterization of a figure on the operatic stage, I do not know of it.

The equally astonishing companion miracle of this performance is the assembling of a cast fully worthy of its star lead. If Adriana is Olivero’s greatest recorded role, Maurizio is likewise that of Franco Corelli. Here his golden tenor rings out gloriously in full throttle: His act I declaration of love “La dolcissima effigie” pours forth with glowing ardor; his renunciation of the Principessa de Bouillon “Grazia! Grazia, signora!” adroitly mingles determination and regret; the act IV love duet “Il nostro amor” blazes with ecstasy, only to be succeeded by Maurizio’s cries of anguish as Adriana succumbs to the Princess’s poisoned violets. If Conrad L. Osborne could somewhat cattily write after the young Plácido Domingo’s last-minute 1968 Met debut as Maurizio that “1 Domingo = 2/3 Corelli,” hearing this performance leads one to a grudging concession of agreement.

Equally stellar laurels go to the likewise immortal Giulietta Simionato as the Principessa di Bouillon. No other mezzo in the world at that time, not even Fedora Barbieri, could have held the stage with Olivero in this work and not been put completely in the shade. “Acerba voluttá” is delivered with fiery indignation, and the confrontations with Adriana in acts II and III positively sizzle with mutual fury. Were this the only surviving document of Simionato’s magnificent artistry, it would suffice to place her among the vocal immortals. Rounding out the four principals is the

Michonnet of Ettore Bastianini. If his forceful interpretation perhaps lacks a degree of nuanced emotional shading (this was his first time singing Michonnet), it is nonetheless a treasure to have his dark, potent voice undertake this seemingly thankless role with such handsome success. All the *comprimario* parts are cast from strength, and the chorus and orchestra fulfill their roles ably. If Mario Rossi is not the last word in conductorial insight here, he nevertheless is a sure and steady hand on the podium in logistically parlous circumstances, for which he deserves much credit.

Far more credit must go to Richard Caniell for his sonic restoration work. The surviving source is of mediocre quality, and even Caniell cannot convert it to the level of a contemporary broadcast from Bayreuth. That said, what he has achieved is most remarkable. All of the many previous issues of this performance have suffered from clotted, muddy sound, further impaired by misguided tampering that made the bass register even more tubby and the treble frequencies shrill if not shorn off. Here, a suffocating wet blanket has been lifted off, revealing much more detail and color, although the sound is still somewhat boxy and strings in their upper registers remain rather harsh. This new version renders every previous one totally obsolete. And while other performances of *Olivero* in this work survive in better sound (Edinburgh 1963, Amsterdam 1965, and Newark 1973—the last named, with Domingo, is preferable to the first two as being the only one having a tenor of requisite caliber), none has the sheer *frisson* of this occasion.

Iris was another opera with which *Olivero* had a unique identification. The work remains a repertoire rarity; while arguably Mascagni's strongest opera musically after *Cavalleria*, with many imaginative passages, the story of a brutally exploited Japanese geisha suffers from the defects of a static libretto, overloaded with perfumed Symbolist language, that seems like a weak melding of *Madama Butterfly* and *Lakmé*; a lack of memorable arias (only the act I tenor serenade "Aprì la tua finestra" has gained some currency); and the composer's perennial inability to be sufficiently self-critical to excise sections of more pedestrian handiwork. Still, with a strong cast, it can make a considerable effect. As the innocent girl who is brutally kidnapped, forced into the life of a geisha, cast aside by her ostensible lover, and rejected as dishonored by her father, but in death is assumed into the glory of the Sun, *Olivero* finds a prime vehicle for her alternatively tender, tormented, and soaring outpourings of passion; she is, in sum, riveting.

There are three surviving complete performances of Olivero in *Iris*: this 1956 Turin broadcast; a 1963 performance from the Concertgebouw with Luigi Ottolini, Renato Capecchi, and Plinio Cabassi led by Fulvio Vernizzi; and an unreleased 1966 Palermo staging with Giuseppe Gismondo, Mario Basiola Jr., and Enrico Campi under Olivero de Fabritiis. Between these three, this 1956 version is easily the one of choice, due primarily to the unexpectedly fine Osaka of the now little-known Salvatore Puma (1930–2007). (By comparison Ottolini is severely over-parted in what is otherwise a very fine performance, whereas Giuseppe Gismondo is gritty and hard-voiced with unstable top notes.) Puma (who can also be heard on CD as Luigi in a quite good *Il tabarro*) had a substantial career in opera houses throughout Italy, elsewhere in Europe, and South America. Although he frequently undertook more heroic roles such as Pollione, Canio, Radamès, and Don José, he also sang lighter parts such as Pinkerton, Edgardo (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), and Alfredo (*La traviata*). His voice, medium in weight and tonal color, has a handsome, bright sound with some underlying mettle; it is well produced throughout its entire range, with real squillo in the firm top notes, and he sings intelligently and with real involvement as the callous seducer Osaka. Considered a second-string lead tenor in the halcyon days of the 1950s, he would likely be a front-ranking star in today's more vocally impoverished operatic world.

Baritone Saturno Meletti (1906–1985) was another stalwart if not outstanding mainstay of Italian opera houses in the immediate post-World War II era. His solid if somewhat dry baritone can be heard in several Cetra releases of radio broadcasts (*Adriana Lecouvreur*, *L'amico Fritz*, *Manon Lescaut*, *La Cenorentola*, *La forza del destino*, *Falstaff*). The evil Kyoto was a specialty role for him—he is also preserved in it in another 1956 performance (unfortunately in poor sound) with the exceptionally fine cast of Clara Petrella, Giuseppe di Stefano, and Boris Christoff under Gianandrea Gavazzi—and he has the part well in hand. The prominent career of Giulio Neri (1909–1958) was sadly cut short by his sudden death from a heart attack. His saturnine, slightly *sec* basso was likewise an anchor to several Cetra recordings—*La favorita*, *La Gioconda*, *Rigoletto*, *Don Carlo*, *Aida*, and above all his magnificent assumption of the title role in Boito's *Mefistofele*—and his *Il Cieco* is suitably anguished and implacably furious. The podium direction of Angelo Questa (1901–1960)—the conductor in several Cetra opera releases and father of the late well-known classicist Cesare Questa and the noted organist Giorgio Questa—is straightforward and secure, ably supporting the singers throughout.

This performance was previously released in 1994 by Fonit Cetra in a deluxe set with two booklets. While the sound there was listenable, the “No Noise” sound reprocessing technology employed there resulted in suppression of higher frequencies, a tubby bass, and some constriction and muddying of the mid-range. Caniell has wrought sonic magic here: The sound is now quite natural, with a bright but not shrill treble range, firm bass, and complete clarity in the mid-range—in particular, the choir’s diction in the massed ensembles is now perfectly understandable instead of being indecipherable mush, and orchestral details likewise shimmer radiantly. Although the 1989 Sony digital recording of the opera with Ilona Tokody, Domingo, Juan Pons, and Bonaldo Giaiotti under Giuseppe Patanè is very fine, and desirable for modern sound and the complete libretto, if one is to have only a single recording of the opera, this one is surely the first choice.

The bonus arias, as indicated, come from various dates and venues. *Manon Lescaut*, and *Katiusha* in *Risurrezione*, were two more prime Olivero roles. We are fortunate to have her impassioned portrayal of Manon in three surviving complete performances, two of which have her partnered by worthy tenors, Richard Tucker in 1971 and Domingo in 1970 (the third performance, from 1964, features the mediocre Umberto Borsò), plus one complete broadcast of Alfano’s unjustly neglected masterpiece (from which this aria is drawn), a thrilling version from 1973 that even the bawling of Giuseppe Gismondo cannot spoil. Magda and the Loreley were parts Olivero never essayed on stage, but the arias occasionally appeared in her recitals. While I personally don’t find her well suited to Magda’s song—I prefer a lighter, more youthful voice such as Anna Moffo—the Catalani (a studio recording for Cetra) shows her again in prime form.

The final, bonus disc in the set is a souvenir that is something of a heart-breaker. Olivero was one of the great Violettas of all time, but the studio discs of her arias from acts I and II (recorded by Cetra in 1940 and 1953), and live performance excerpts of act II, scene 1 (from “Madamigella Valery” to Germont’s departure) and act III (afflicted with several theater cuts) are the only surviving extended vocal documents of her in this role. I will risk outrage from fans of Maria Callas by stating here that I have never liked her Violetta; as much as I admire her interpretive artistry, for me the voice itself is all wrong for the role and often afflicted with genuinely ugly passages. Olivero, with a very similar sound at this stage in her career, has many of the interpretive virtues of Callas (though she arguably over-acts in a manner more suitable to *verismo*) and none of her vocal flaws. There is no wobble or moment of faulty intonation; her execution of fioratura is clean;

and her total investiture in the role is utterly heart-breaking. The two studio recordings have some surface crackle; the 1967 act III is in quite listenable sound. The two tenors are both quite fine (Doro Antonioli is new to my acquaintance, and this interests me in hearing more by him), and Protti is also in good form, but the focus here is rightly on Olivero, whose death scene is a histrionic *tour de force* of wrenching passion. The four additional Puccini excerpts all find her in prime form and are treasurable encores.

As always, Caniell gives his set deluxe treatment—multiple top-notch booklet essays, cast information, detailed track listings, plot summaries, artist bios, vintage photos, recording notes, and even a reflection by Olivero herself. The in-depth essay by Stephen Hastings on Olivero is especially worthy of being singled out for attention. The refurbished *Adriana* would be sufficient reason to place this set in the Classical Hall of Fame; with the likewise restored *Iris* partnering it as an equally worthy candidate for such recognition, and the *La traviata* excerpts and other arias included as a free bonus, this set becomes a mandatory acquisition not just for fans of Olivero in particular but for devotees of verismo in general. This is, in sum, operatic ambrosia worthy of the gods—don't miss it!

Review by Ken Meltzer

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A new release by Immortal Performances (five discs, priced as four) celebrates the artistry of the legendary Italian soprano, Magda Olivero (1910-2014). In the 1930s, Olivero established herself an important artist. Then in the early 1940s, at what seemed to be the height of her career, Magda Olivero retired from the stage to devote herself to her family. In 1950, Olivero received a letter from Francesco Cilea. The composer, in failing health and what proved to be the final year of his life, implored Olivero to return to the stage to perform one of her most celebrated heroines, the role in Cilea's opera *Adriana Lecouvreur*. Olivero acceded to Cilea's wish, marking the beginning of the second phase of her career. On April 3, 1975, at the age of 65, Olivero made her Met debut in Puccini's *Tosca*. Even after her retirement at the age of 71, Olivero continued to sing beautifully. A perusal of YouTube yields examples of Olivero, well into her 80s, giving mesmerizing performances of verismo repertoire. The word "genius" is often too liberally applied when it comes to artistic

expression, but I believe it is a fitting description of Magda Olivero. Her basic vocal gifts were, truth be told, rather unremarkable. Olivero's voice did not approach the natural beauty of Milanov, Tebaldi, or Caballé, the power of Nilsson, or the individual timbre of Callas. But Olivero deployed her instrument with breathtaking technical mastery and artistic insight. As a result, Olivero was able to create the *impression* of a voice of arresting beauty, a rich and varied palette of colors, dynamic range, power, and breath control. Olivero's patrician diction was crystal-clear. A beautiful and elegant woman, Olivero's stage presence was both regal and entirely convincing from a dramatic perspective. And among verismo sopranos, it was Magda Olivero who best displayed the unerring sense of how to push emotional stakes to the absolute limit, without descending into poor taste or bombast. When Magda Olivero performed a death scene, the audience could easily be persuaded it was witnessing the real thing. Sad to say, Olivero's studio recordings are few. There are only two such documents of complete operas; Olivero's Liù in the 1938 Cetra *Turandot*, and Decca's 1969 *Fedora*. Those interested in exploring the legacy of Magda Olivero have searched for her in-performance recordings, of which, thank goodness, there are many.

One of the cornerstones of any Magda Olivero collection is a November 28, 1959 *Adriana Lecouvreur*, broadcast from the stage of the Teatro San Carlo in Naples. The scheduled Adriana, Renata Tebaldi, became ill. Olivero, who was herself recuperating from surgery, stepped in at the very last moment to save the performance. And it is the performance of a lifetime. A mesmerizing account of Adriana's entrance aria, "Io son l'umile ancella," inspires a prolonged, ecstatic outburst from the Naples audience. And from there, Olivero moves from strength to strength, providing a master class in the art of verismo opera performance. Even if the remaining principals were only acceptable, this 1959 Naples *Adriana Lecouvreur* would be essential listening. But on this occasion, Olivero was joined by three of the greatest performers of the era, all at the height of their powers. Mezzo Giulietta Simionato is a force of nature as Adriana's rival, the Princess Bouillon. Adriana's lover, Maurizio, is Franco Corelli; in prime voice, which is to say one of the most sumptuous and brilliant tenors documented on recordings. In addition to his bronze vocal quality and ringing high notes, Corelli's remarkable breath control allowed him to create magical effects with extended crescendos and diminuendos, both in evidence here. And while Corelli was not in Olivero's league as an actor (few were), he throws himself wholeheartedly into the role of Maurizio. Michonnet, the stage manager who secretly pines for Adriana, is more of a character baritone role than a heroic one. Ettore Bastianini was famous for

his assumptions of the latter type of part, but he brings admirable sensitivity to the role, along with his characteristic rich, dark, and vibrant tone. Mario Rossi, a first-rate conductor of Italian operatic repertoire, leads a performance that both crackles with energy and savors Cilea's rich orchestral palette. My previous version of this performance was a 1999 release on the Hardy Classics label. It is in quite decent mono sound, much what you would expect from broadcasts of that era, and certainly more than adequate to enjoy this incredible performance. The Immortal Performances restoration is derived from the RAI master. It has the immediate advantage over the Hardy release of including the pre-performance announcements and curtain calls, intensifying the sense of the historic occasion. Here, the voices also emerge with greater focus and color than in the Hardy Classics release. While the difference is not as dramatic as with some other releases by this company, the Immortal Performances restoration now becomes my preferred version.

The second complete opera on this set is Mascagni's *Iris*, from a September 12, 1956 Turin Radio broadcast, performed before a studio audience that, aside from a few moments of applause, is unobtrusive. The broadcast sound quality is excellent as well, perhaps just a bit shy of the fidelity of studio recordings of the day. The broadcast is preceded by the announcer's spoken introduction. Mascagni's opera, set to a libretto by Luigi Illica, relates the tragic story of an innocent young Japanese girl who is kidnapped and transported to a brothel. Iris rejects the advances of Osaka, the man who lusts for her, as well as the machinations of Kyoto the brothel owner. Nevertheless, Iris is cursed by her father, who believes her immoral. Iris plunges to a death that occurs only after an extended, transformative scene in which her soul is redeemed. Iris is a younger and far more innocent person than the worldly actress Adriana Lecouvreur. Here Olivero, in wonderful voice, adopts a fresher, more youthful tone, and delicate form of expression. The performance is notable for its sensitivity and restraint, making the euphoria of Iris's death scene all the more powerful. As Osaka, the young man who pursues Iris, tenor Salvatore Puma sings robustly, securely, and with some style in a role first performed by one of the most poetic of tenors, Fernando de Lucia. Saturno Meletti and Giulio Neri bring secure, powerful voices and dramatic involvement to the roles of the brothel owner Kyoto, and Iris's blind father, Il Cieco. Soprano Amalia Oliva is lovely in the role of Dhia, the heroine of a puppet show staged to entice Iris. And Mario Carlin, a fine comprimario tenor, sings beautifully in the brief role of a ragpicker who comes upon the mortally injured Iris. Conductor Angelo Questo draws fine performances

from the RAI-Torino Orchestra and Chorus, the latter accorded the glorious “Hymn to the Sun” episodes that open and close the work.

Adriana Lecouvreur occupies the first two discs of this release, with *Iris* following on numbers three and four. The remainder of disc four and the totality of five comprise highlights from various operas, with performance dates spanning from the early 1940s through the early 1970s. First are several excerpts from verismo works, with Olivero demonstrating the same mastery of style and vocal resources evidenced in the complete Cilea and Mascagni operas. Of special note I think, are the selections from Alfano’s *Risurrezione* and Puccini’s *La rondine*. Olivero was in her early 60s at the time of these recordings, and the soprano amazes with her ability to conjure the presence of youthful heroines. Also quite remarkable is a 1968 performance of “Un bel dì” from *Madama Butterfly*. It is vocalized to perfection, and with an attention to detail in each phrase, indeed each word, that gives this familiar aria a Shakespearean nobility, eloquence, and emotional impact. The bonus selections conclude with portions of Verdi’s *La traviata*. At first glance, Verdi’s 1853 opera might seem out of place in the company of operas dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But in truth once past the first act, *La traviata*, especially with regard to the heroine Violetta, anticipates the verismo movement, both in terms of plot and music. Violetta’s tragic plight (based upon a true story) embodies the “slice of life” parameters embraced by many verismo works. And both the declamatory vocal writing and moments of the spoken word Verdi writes for Violetta reappear time and time again in the works of this composer’s verismo successors. It’s not surprising that Olivero’s Violetta is every bit as effective and convincing as her verismo heroines. A 1940 studio recording of Violetta’s concluding scene from Act I reveals that in the early stages of her career, brilliant coloratura and stratospheric high notes were very much a part of Olivero’s vocal arsenal. Violetta’s Act II farewell to Alfredo (“Amami Alfredo”), from a 1953 recording, is heart-rending. The remaining *Traviata* excerpts date from a May 6, 1967 Amsterdam performance. First is the elder Germont-Violetta confrontation. Olivero is magnificent, ever attentive to Violetta’s desperation against all hope to retain her new-found happiness. Any baritone singing Germont to Olivero’s Violetta would face a daunting foil. The Germont is Aldo Protti, a singer who parlayed a warm, Italianate voice and reliable technique into a long career. Dramatic imagination, variety, and nuance were never Protti’s strengths. Here, he is a monochromatic Germont; not entirely out of place considering that the character is implacably urging, and even bullying, Violetta to sacrifice herself for his family. One oddity: in the repetition of “Dite, alla giovine”, Protti does not sing his music that serves

as counterpart to Violetta's melody. The selections conclude with a complete performance of *La traviata's* final act, which is very much Violetta's show. In the reading of the letter, "Teneste la promessa", Olivero's speaking voice—resigned, fatigued, and wracked with illness—chilled this reviewer to his very core. I mentioned before Olivero's mastery in death scenes, and this final act is yet another spellbinding example. Tenor Doro Antonioli is more of an asset than Protti, offering some lovely hushed singing in "Parigi, o cara". But in the end, one is left marveling at the artistry of Magda Olivero, and a performance filled with imaginative and dramatically spot-on touches that convince as entirely spontaneous. The Amsterdam *Traviata* excerpts are in excellent sound, and the remaining bonus material is also quite fine from a sonic perspective.

The two booklets included with this release feature an appreciation of Olivero by Stephen Hastings, a superb analyst and writer on vocal music, Olivero's own moving account of Cilea's plea for her to return to the stage, Richard Caniell's warm and insightful analysis of Olivero's art, biographies of Cilea and Mascagni, synopses of the two complete operas, Caniell's Recording Notes, and artist bios and photos. As I mentioned, we are fortunate that many Olivero performances were recorded. This release includes complete documents of two of Olivero's finest roles, in excellent sonic restorations. The bonus material is also priceless. If you love verismo opera and don't already own these recordings, you should make them a priority. And if you own the *Adriana Lecouvreur* via a previous release, I still think you'll want to give the Immortal Performances restoration strong consideration. A grand and worthy tribute to a unique and irreplaceable artist. Highly recommended.