

A composite image featuring a portrait of Giuseppe di Stefano on the left, looking towards the right. The background is a panoramic view of Naples, Italy, showing dense urban architecture, red-tiled roofs, and green hills in the foreground. The title text is overlaid on the top right.

Giuseppe di Stefano

Neapolitan Songs

alto

Neapolitan Songs

1	Luigi Denza: <i>Funiculì-Funiculà</i> *	2:36
2	Eduardo di Capua: <i>O sole mio</i> †	3:35
3	Salvatore Cardillo: <i>Core 'ngrato</i> †	3:41
4	Ernesto de Curtis: <i>Torna a Surriento</i> †	3:25
5	Ruggero Leoncavallo: <i>Mattinata</i> *	2:11
6	Francesco Paolo Tosti: <i>Ideale</i> *	3:26
7	Tosti: <i>A vucchella</i> *	2:45
8	Capua: <i>I'te vurria vasà</i> !†	3:44
9	Tosti: <i>Marechiare</i> †	3:28
10	Cesare Andrea Bixio: <i>Parlami d'amore Mariù</i> †	3:15
11	Curtis: <i>A canzone 'e Napule</i> †	4:18
12	Traditional arr. Alberto Favara: <i>Chiovu 'Abballati</i> †	1:27
13	Curtis: <i>Carmela</i> *	3:10
14	Salve D'Esposito: <i>Anima e core</i> *	4:05
15	Cesare Andrea Bixio: <i>Lolita</i> *	2:47
16	Curtis: <i>Ti voglio tanto bene</i> †	3:12
17	Tosti: <i>L'ultima canzone</i> *	4:52
18	Rodolfo Pennino: <i>Pecchè?</i> †	2:55
19	Traditional arr. Favara: <i>Cantu a Timuni</i> †	2:21
20	Traditional arr. Favara: <i>Muttetti di lu paliu</i> †	2:59
21	Giuseppe Gioè: <i>I'm'arricordo 'e Napule</i> *	3:58
22	Giambattista Valente: <i>Torna a Sorriento</i> *	3:06
23	Giuseppe Gastaldon: <i>Musica proibita</i> *	3:44

Giuseppe di Stefano, tenor

with orchestra conducted by

***Gian Mario Guarino** and †**Dino Olivieri**

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

In his heyday, **Giuseppe di Stefano** quite simply possessed the most beautiful tenor voice on the planet. His good looks made him a natural for television and on such occasions he would sing well loved *canzone Napoletana* such as those heard in this collection. Di Stefano (known to friends and fans as Pippo) was born on 24 July 1921 at Motta Santa Anastasia, near Catania, Sicily. His parents moved to Milan and he was educated at a school run by Jesuits (he briefly wanted to become a priest). In 1938 he was persuaded to enter singing contests, two of which (held in Milan and Florence) he won. Studying with Adriano Tocchio he sang in the chorus at La Scala, Milan, supplementing his chorister's income by singing opera, current dance band hits and Neapolitan songs at pavement cafes, restaurants and in the intermissions between films at cinemas. In 1940 he switched teachers, taking lessons from the baritone Luigi Montesanto. Di Stefano was conscripted in 1941 but failed the medical and thus was spared active service. Instead, under the name Nino Florio, he entertained Italian troops at army camps. When the Germans occupied northern Italy he went to Switzerland where he was briefly interned.

Di Stefano made his official debut as Des Grieux in Massenet's *Manon* on 20 April 1946 and soon performed in this opera and in *The Pearl Fishers*, *Rigoletto*, *Traviata* and *L'amico Fritz* at several Italian houses including Venice and Genoa. That same year he sang at the Liceu in Barcelona. 1947 saw di Stefano performing at La Scala, in Rome and Trieste. His fame spread far and wide leading to an invitation from the Metropolitan Opera to sing in *Rigoletto* and *Manon*. In 1948 he guested with a number of North American companies and sang at the Metropolitan Opera every season until 1952 in a number of operas including *Mignon*, *Traviata*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *Falstaff*, *Bohème* and *Mefistofele*. American fans of di Stefano were disappointed when the tenor fell out with the Met's General Manager Rudolf Bing and had to wait three years before he sang there again.

In 1951 di Stefano and Callas sang together for the first time and over the next few years the two often appeared together in productions and in the recording studio. He also made memorable appearances alongside Tebaldi in Florence, Genoa and at La Scala and in a notable production of *Tosca* in Chicago with Steber and Gobbi. Di Stefano's successful working relationship with Callas soured in May 1955 when he was angered by the amount of press attention the diva received at the time of a major new production by Visconti of *Traviata* at La Scala and he responded by walking out. This was not the only time di Stefano was to leave a production in the lurch: that year he also pulled out of *Lucia* in Berlin and in poor voice in 1963 he cancelled performances of *Bohème* at Covent Garden, when his place was taken by the then unknown Luciano Pavarotti.

His reappearance at the Met in 1955 as Don José marked the beginning of a new phase in di Stefano's career when he began to take on heavier roles. Before the

end of the decade he had played Radamès, Turiddu and Canio, Don Alvaro, Calaf and the title role in *Andrea Chenier*. Occasionally he returned to lyric roles (eg Nemorino for his British debut at the 1957 Edinburgh Festival) but he was now singing parts he was ill-equipped to attempt and his voice began to lose its beloved melting quality and became instead coarse and strained. Di Stefano's claim that the cause of his vocal decline was an allergy to the rugs with which he decorated his Milan home, strains one's credulity. Generally his performances in the early 1960s were poorly received although he remained popular in Vienna and between July and November 1967 he toured successfully in Lehar's *Land of Smiles* singing in a number of North American cities. Thereafter he wound down his stage career making his final appearance in a leading role in Turin in Verdi's *Vespro siciliano* in 1973. In 1972 - 3 he unwisely accompanied Callas on her ill-fated farewell tour and thereafter appeared only intermittently, making his own farewell appearance in 1992 at Caracalla in Rome as the old emperor in *Turandot*.

In November 2004 the operatic world was shocked to hear that di Stefano and his wife had been viciously attacked whilst on holiday in Kenya. A bracelet given to him many years before by Maria Callas was among the items stolen. Having sustained serious head injuries, he received intensive care in Mombasa. Following return to Italy di Stefano underwent several operations and having entered the San Raffaele clinic in Milan (December 2007) he slipped into a coma. He died in March 2008.

Not only can one find the best pizza and ice-cream in Naples; it has also been home to many of the most tuneful European song-writers and much of their finest work, usually serenades or laments about an unhappy love-life sung in the Neapolitan dialect, is to be heard in this collection. Song composers had been inspired by the beautiful coastline of Naples for centuries before the authorities in Mergellina (the coastal part of Naples) initiated the annual song-writing festival in the 1830s in Piedigrotta at the church of the Madonna, situated close to an ancient Roman tunnel. One of the first prize-winners was Donizetti and until the festival was abandoned in 1950, several other well-known composers had become involved. *Canzone Napoletana* (Songs in the dialect of Naples) became familiar outside Italy from the 1880s when they were introduced to America by emigrants and international interest in the genre rocketed following Caruso's recording of Leoncavallo's *Mattinata*. Fernando de Lucia also included these items in concert and on record. From the succeeding generation both Gigli and Schipa sang *Canzone Napoletana* and later tenors and baritones such as Di Stefano, Franco Corelli, Mario Del Monaco, Tito Gobbi, Gino Bechi and Renato Capecchi also successfully crossed over from the operatic field into popular song. Others such as Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, Tony and Dean Martin and Vic Damone explored their 'inner Italian' and 1950s hit parades became liberally sprinkled with hits such as *It's now or never*, *Come back to Sorrento* and *Surrender* whilst Mario Lanza also made a highly successful LP. The 1990 World

Cup, held in Italy, provided the perfect excuse for the football-loving tenors Pavarotti, Domingo and Carreras to show off and record popular songs of the host nation, which included several hits by Domenico Modugno and Musumarra, successors in the great Neapolitan song-writing tradition.

One of the most prolific Neapolitan composers was **Luigi Denza** (1846–1922) whose *Funiculi, funicula* was commissioned for the opening of the funicular railway to Mount Vesuvius in 1880 which was destroyed in an eruption in 1944. By the time this song was composed Denza had moved to London but so quickly did the song catch on that Richard Strauss quoted it in his *Aus Italien* (1886), assuming it to be a traditional song.

Paolo Tosti (1846–1916) was another Italian composer who moved to England (he became music teacher to the Royal Family, became a British citizen and was knighted in 1908). His songs are exceptionally popular outside Italy and several non-Italian singers such as Jussi Bjoerling included them in their concert programmes.

Eduardo Di Capua (1864–1917) remained in Naples, the city of his birth, and his *O sole mio* (1898), undoubtedly the most familiar song in this collection, has done much for the Italian tourist industry and for makers of ice cream the world over!

It could however be argued that more hits came from the pen of **Ernesto de Curtis** (1875–1937). He and his brother Giambattista dedicated *Torna a Surriento* to the Italian President in the early 1900s in an attempt to bolster the local tourist industry.

Nicola Valente (1881–1946) came from a musical family and later published his own songs which during the 1930s and 1940s became extremely popular.

Salve D'Esposito (1903–82) who, after periods in France and England, moved back to Italy. In 1948 he began collaborating with the lyricist Tito Manlio and together they wrote the huge hit *Anema 'e core* (1950).

Naples-born **Cesare Andrea Bixio** (1898–1978), one of the best known Italian song-writers of the inter-war period whose songs have been much recorded, was also well known as a film composer.

Emphasising the close relationship between Italian opera and popular song, this collection includes *Mattinata* by the Neapolitan born **Ruggiero Leoncavallo** (1857–1919), whose fame rests almost entirely on *Pagliacci* (1892). *Mattinata* was composed especially for Caruso who recorded it in 1904.

Stanislao Gastaldon (1861–1939) composed another operatic version of the *Cavalleria Rusticana* story but his most familiar work by far is the song *Musica proibita* (1881), composed to his own lyrics.

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Alto ALC1226

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Recorded in 1953 (2-4, 8), 1953 (8), 1956 (9, 22), 1959 (10-12, 16, 18-20), and 1961 (1, 5-7, 13-15, 17, 21, 23)

Producer: **Tony Watts**

Mastered for alto by **Paul Arden-Taylor**

2026 digital edition produced by **Gene Gaudette, Urlicht AudioVisual**

Cover image: Di Stefano courtesy **Tully Potter Archive**; Prod. **Richard Burch**

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Design produced by **Imergent Images Ltd**

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