

Nicolai Gedda

'The Cosmopolitan Tenor'

Great Arias from
Opera & Operetta



Bizet

Mozart

Adam

Gluck

Lehár

Strauss

Gounod

Glinka

& many more

alto

Nicolai Gedda

The Cosmopolitan Tenor

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 1 | Adolphe Adam: <i>Le Postillon de Lonjumeau</i> -
Mes amis, écoutez l'histoire | 3:49 |
| 2 | Edouard Lalo: <i>Le Roi d'Ys</i> -
Puisqu'on ne peut fléchir... Vainement... (Aubade) | 3:20 |
| 3 | Ambroise Thomas: <i>Mignon</i> - Elle ne croyait pas
Orchestre National de l'ORTF • -Georges Prêtre, <i>conductor</i> | 3:33 |
| 4 | Charles Gounod: <i>Faust</i> - Quel trouble inconnu...
Salut! Demeure chaste et pure | 5:40 |
| Orchestre de l'Opéra de Paris • -André Cluytens, <i>conductor</i> | | |
| 5 | Georges Bizet: <i>Les Pêcheurs de Perles</i> - Je crois entendre encore | 3:31 |
| 6 | Jules Massenet: <i>Werther</i> - Pourquoi me réveiller?
Philharmonia Orchestra • -Alceo Galliera, <i>conductor</i> | 2:50 |
| 7 | Bizet: <i>Carmen</i> - La fleur qui tu m'avais jetée ("Flower Song")
Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française •
Sir Thomas Beecham, <i>conductor</i> | 4:47 |
| 8 | Christoph Willibald Glück: <i>Orphée et Euridice</i> -
J'ai perdu, mon Euridice | 4:06 |
| Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire • -
Louis de Froment, <i>conductor</i> | | |
| 9 | Gaetano Donizetti: <i>L'elisir d'amore</i> - Una furtiva lagrima | 3:55 |
| 10 | Piotr Ilich Tchaikovsky: <i>Eugene Onegin, Op. 24</i> - Lensky's Aria
Philharmonia Orchestra • -Alceo Galliera, <i>conductor</i> | 6:13 |
| 11 | Mikhail Glinka: <i>A Life for the Tsar</i> - Brother, in the Darkness
Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux • -Igor Markevitch, <i>conductor</i> | 6:17 |
| 12 | Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: <i>Così fan tutte, K. 588</i> - Un'aura amorosa
Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire •
André Cluytens, <i>conductor</i> | 4:26 |
| 13 | Mozart: <i>Don Giovanni, K. 527</i> - Il mio Tesoro
Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux • Hans Rosbaud, <i>conductor</i> | 4:16 |
| 14 | Friedrich von Flotow: <i>Martha</i> - Ach so fromm
Philharmonia Orchestra • Alceo Galliera, <i>conductor</i> | 3:20 |

- | | | |
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| 15 | Johann Strauss II: <i>Der Zigeunerbaron</i> - Als flotter Geist | 2:32 |
| 16 | Strauss II: <i>Eine Nacht in Venedig</i> - Sei mir gegrüsst du Holdes Venezia | 2:23 |
| 17 | Franz Lehár: <i>Das Land des Lächelns</i> - Ich trete ins Zimmer...
- - - Immer nur lächeln | 4:25 |
| 18 | Lehár: <i>Das Land des Lächelns</i> - Dein ist mein ganzes Herz
Philharmonia Orchestra • Otto Ackermann, <i>conductor</i> | 3:30 |

Produced by **Tony Watts**

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

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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Nicolai Gedda (Harry Gustaf Ustinov) was born in Stockholm on 11 July 1925 to Russian and Swedish parents. Between 1928 and 1934 the family lived in Leipzig where his father, who had sung bass with the Don Cossack Choir, was organist and choirmaster for the Russian Orthodox Church. Despite Gedda's love of music, back in Sweden his first career after military service was as a bank clerk. However Gedda (who adopted his mother's maiden name professionally) made no secret of his passion for music and it was one of his customers, a member of the Stockholm Royal Opera orchestra, who suggested in 1949 that he audition for the famous tenor-turned-teacher Carl Martin Oehmann. Gedda's rendition of 'Una furtiva lagrima' convinced Oehmann that here was a singer with a future and after just two months' tuition from Oehmann, Gedda was awarded the Christine Nilsson Prize, enabling study at the Stockholm Royal Conservatory.

Gedda's rise was meteoric: his debut with the Stockholm Opera is generally credited as being in the role of Chapelou in Adam's *Le Postillon de Lonjumeau* in April 1952, but the previous year he had performed in the premiere of Sutermeister's *Röde Stöveln* (Der rote Stiefel). It was however his enormous success in *Postillon* (the titular role lies murderously high) which led directly to the offer of the role of Dimitri in Dobrowen's recording of *Boris Godunov* (HMV, July 1952). Karajan's enthusiasm for this recording led the following year to further triumphs as Don Ottavio at La Scala where Gedda received a personal invitation from Carl Orff to sing the part of the Bridegroom in the premiere of *Trionfo di Afrodite* (1953).

By then Gedda had made more recordings for Columbia: Bach's *Mass in B minor* (November 1952) under Karajan and the first two in a classic series of operetta recordings, Lehar's *Die lustige Witwe* and *Das Land des Lächelns* (made concurrently during April 1953). Also during 1953 Gedda recorded several arias included in this collection.

1954 saw Gedda singing for the first time at both the Paris Opéra (Huon *Oberon*) and at Covent Garden (Duke *Rigoletto*). He also appeared in Rome in Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* and in 1957 made an eagerly awaited American debut (Faust in Pittsburgh) followed by further performances in this role at the Met, where he sang for the next 22 seasons. In addition to Faust, among the many parts he sang in New York were Nemorino, Lensky *Yevgeny Onegin*, Hoffmann and

leading roles in two premieres: Barber's *Vanessa* (1958) and Menotti's *Le dernier sauvage* (The Last Savage 1964).

Despite his natural talent for Mozart and operetta Gedda had to wait until 1957 before he gave his first performances in Austria when he was heard at the Salzburg Festival (Belmonte *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*) and in Vienna. Four years later at the Holland Festival Gedda added another part he made very much his own, the title role in *Benvenuto Cellini* by Berlioz. He sang in this opera at Covent Garden (1966, 1969, 1976), recorded it for Philips and also sang the part elsewhere including Geneva (1964).

Gedda performed until well into his seventies, retiring from the stage in 1997 but continuing to sing in concert. His recorded voice in later years, evidenced by his performance in Korngold's *Das Wunder der Heliane* (1992, Decca), still possessed some of the fine quality that marked his early recordings. A natural linguist, Gedda was dubbed 'the cosmopolitan *par excellence*' by Gisela Storjohann (*Opera* December 1966). He recorded widely and was especially admired for his work in French, Italian, Russian and German opera and operetta. He also recorded Spanish and Italian songs, Lieder, baroque music and oratorio – he was a superb Gerontius.

Gedda's success in so many areas is a tribute to his professionalism. Audiences were faced with an embarrassment of riches during the 1950s and 1960s with the tenor voice. Yet Harold Rosenthal when reviewing Gedda's second commercial recording of *Carmen* wrote 'He is not, of course, a dramatic tenor, nor is he French; but he is probably the best tenor singing in French opera today' (*Opera* April 1965). Adam's once popular *Le Postillon de Longjumeau* (1836) is now recognised for one aria during which the title character describes his romantic and exciting life, pinging out a top D in the process. Lalo composed the heroic opera *Le roi d'Ys* between 1875 and 1878 but waited ten years for its premiere. The famous 'Aubade' occurs in the final act. Thomas' *Mignon* (1866), based on episodes from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, was immensely popular in the nineteenth century and its third act aria 'Elle ne croyait pas' was frequently recorded in the 78 era but is now largely forgotten. Gounod's *Faust* (1859) was recorded twice by EMI in the 1950s with the same principal trio and conductor: de los Angeles, Gedda, Christoff, Cluytens. This performance of 'Salut! demeure chaste et pure' is taken from the earlier (1953) recording. Faust stands in the garden outside

Marguerite's home declaring it to be as beautiful and pure as nature itself. Apart from the duet 'Au fond du temple saint' the remainder of Bizet's wonderful opera ***Pearl Fishers*** is not so well known. Yet, as with the *Mignon* aria, in the days of 78s numerous tenors left bewitching accounts of the wonderful aria 'Je crois entendre encore'. In old Ceylon Nadir remembers the time when he first heard the voice of the lovely priestess Leïla.

Gedda recorded ***Werther*** much later but already in 1953 he had complete understanding of the complex emotions stirring within Massenet's character. The melancholy Werther has fallen in love with Charlotte but learns that she is engaged to another man and has left in despair. At his unexpected return Charlotte attempts to act normally but the emotional temperature rises as, during the aria 'Pourquoi me reveiller' he reads a poem that is dear to them both. Bizet's Flower Song from ***Carmen*** (1875) requires little introduction; Gedda's performance of this aria was described by John Steane as 'dramatised afresh...a 'lived' re-created experience' (*The Grand Tradition*, Duckworth 1974). Gluck substantially altered the role of Orfeo to suit the *haute-contre* range for a 1774 Paris production of ***Orfeo ed Euridice*** (renamed *Orphée*). Here Gedda sings the famous lament over Euridice's corpse in Hades.

Gedda played Nemorino in ***L'elisir d'amore*** (1832) with enormous success throughout his long career. This hapless country bumpkin is hopelessly in love with Adina and fears that he has lost her to a man in uniform. In 'Una furtiva lagrima' he admits he would rather die than lose her.

From Tchaikovsky's ***Yevgeny Onegin*** (1879) comes Lensky's heart-rending aria before the fateful duel with his erstwhile friend Onegin. He sings of his love for Olga (with whom Onegin had flirted) and of the likelihood that he will not survive. Glinka's ***A Life for the Tsar*** (1836) was composed in the French tradition but with a Russian subject: the attempted assassination of the Tsar by the Poles in 1613. Here, Sobinin searches for his friend Susanin who has been captured by Polish forces.

The stylish Gedda excelled in Mozart and often performed Ferrando (***Così fan tutte***) and Don Ottavio (***Don Giovanni***). These recordings demonstrate a familiarity with these roles but are anything but routine: he brings what often seems to be the rather dull character of

Don Ottavio to life. Flotow's ***Martha*** (1847) remains popular in Germany but is little known elsewhere, despite its witty English setting. However 'Ach so fromm' is much recorded both in German and Italian.

The remaining tracks are from the classic operetta recordings made under Walter Legge's supervision. Among the stage works of Johann Strauss, ***Der Zigeunerbaron*** (1885) is second only in popularity to *Fledermaus*. Consisting of a succession of wonderful melodies, one of the finest is Barinkay's opening number 'Als flotter Geist'. In contrast, ***Eine Nacht in Venedig*** (1883) was almost laughed off stage at its premiere in Berlin. Forty years later score and book were revisited by Korngold and Marschka, who struggled to make sense out of a convoluted tale set against a Venetian backdrop during Carnival. Gedda was often compared to Tauber and nowhere more obviously than in this recording of Lehar's ***Das Land des Lächelns*** (1929), a sumptuously scored work which explored the cultural and sociological differences between east and west in an intelligent and attractive manner. In 'Immer nur lächeln' Sou Chong explains to his Western wife the role of the smile in Chinese courtship; in 'Dein ist mein ganzes Herz' he is torn between his country's traditions and love for his wife, whom he declares he loves above all else.

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