

MORE GREAT VOICES OF OPERA

Recommended Recordings and Reading Material

Many of the books I've suggested are out of print and even those that are still around aren't likely to be found in local shops. First try the Public Library. Run a search on their website. If they have what you're looking for, have it forwarded to your local branch. Best sources for recordings is: <http://www.amazon.com>. Amazon is also great for books as is Abe Books in England: <http://www.abebooks.co.uk>. Both have used as well as new books - and used can be a LOT cheaper.)

The recordings that I recommend are what I like. You may prefer others. Prowl on YouTube and see what you like, then find a CD that has it. The books listed are what I think are the best of what is available, but in some cases there are no currently available English Language biographies or, in some cases, none at all. I can heartily recommend The Grand Tradition: "Seventy Years of Singing on Record" by J.B. Steane, an analysis of recordings my great opera artists. It's out of print but used copies can be found. Steane also wrote a great 3-volume set, "Singers of the Century" with biographies of almost all the great opera singers in the 20th Century.

When you listen to historical recordings, accuracy of sound reproduction is of paramount importance. Early recordings had great problems. There were no standard recording speeds and disks had soft wax surfaces so clicks and pops and surface scratches are common. Modern digital techniques have enabled sound engineers to recapture or recreate some of the missing or distorted sound but it is an art, not a science. The premiere sound restoration expert in the country is Ward Marston, who contracts to many record companies and also has his own label. If you see his name listed as the sound engineer, it's a good bet the job has been well done.

If you get deeply involved in old opera recordings, there are two web sites you might enjoy. The first is Ward Marton's: <http://www.marstonrecords.com/> He issues restored versions of great opera singers and pianists. Fair warning, he has stuff you didn't even know existed. The other is Immortal Performances: <http://immortalperformances.org/> They specialize in restoration of rare radio broadcasts of complete operas:

And did you know that you can download anything that's on You Tube to your computer or your Smart Phone? Go to: <http://www.atube.me/video/> and download **A Tube Catcher**. It allows you to download as either a video or an audio file. For Mac users, try either **YTD Download** at www.ytd downloader.com or **MACX Downloader** at www.macxdvd.com. Both are free.

CLASS ONE

Eileen Farrell

CD-Sings Verdi Arias - CBS

CD-I've Got A Right To Sing The Blues - CBS

VIDEO DVD-Eileen Farrell: An American Prima Donna

Autobiography Can't Help Singing - Northeastern Press

Eileen Farrell actually made more recordings of popular songs than she did of opera arias or complete operas. CBS (which was then known as Columbia Records) was her label. The video documentary is excellent and her autobiography is candid, straightforward, and honest. What more can you ask?

Geraldine Farrar

CD In Italian Opera - Nimbus

CD In French Opera - Nimbus

Biography Geraldine Farrar: Opera's Charismatic Innovator - McFarland Press

Farrar didn't really have a great voice and in her earliest recordings the technology of the time did her no favors. Still, for her time, she put a lot of meaning into what she sang.

Beverly Sills

CD The Art of Beverly Sills Vol. 1 & 2 - CBS

DVD Beverly Sills: Made In America - DGG

VIDEO DVD Daughter Of The Regiment

Autobiography Bubbles: a self portrait - Bobbs Merrill

There must be a dozen or more Sills CD's out there. Pick the one that has music you prefer. The CBS set is a good starter. The lady wrote two autobiographies of which I prefer "Bubbles" but either is good. Informative without being really revealing. Which is about what can be said of the Dvd documentary. Her "Barber of Seville" is available on VHS, but not on DVD. Dunno why. Get "Daughter of the Regiment" as a close second in charm and vivacity.

CLASS TWO

Tito Schipa

CD Tito Schipa - Prima Voce

CD Schipa In Neapolitan Song - Prima Voce

Biography: Schipa (Great Voices) - Baskerville Publishers

Prima Voce is a sub-label of Nimbus and has as good sound reproduction as you can find.

The book is written by his son, Tito Schipa, Jr. And while it may gloss over some flaws, it provides a wealth of information.

Tito Gobbi

CD Tito Gobbi: the Complete Solo Recordings (5 CD) - Warner Classics

CD The Very Best of Tito Gobbi - EMI

VIDEO DVD Otello - VAI

VIDEO DVD Maria Callas... Toujours Paris 1958 - EMI Classics

Biography: My Life by Tito Gobbi - Doubleday

The 5 CD set by Warner's is a bargain, but if you want a smaller sampling, the EMI disc is fine. Both have excellent sound. Callas on DVD? Yes, because this disc includes act Two of "Tosca" with Callas & Gobbi. There's another Callas DVD (Covent Garden 1962-1964) with their Covent Garden "Tosca." There just aren't many videos with Gobbi out there. He is on the 1955 "Pagliacci" with Franco Corelli and that's well worth buying. And Gobbi's autobiography is very well done.

Conchita Supervia

CD Supervia in Opera & Song - Prima Voce

CD The Complete Supervia (4 Volumes) - Marston

No English language biography currently available

Marston and Prima Voce. Can't get any better. Clips from her only movie, "Evensong" are on YouTube. She sang only one aria and two short songs in it.

Victoria de Los Angeles

CD The Best of Victoria de Los Angeles - EMI

CD On Wings of Song and Zarzuela Arias - EMI

VIDEO DVD Victoria de Los Angeles - EMI

Biography: Victoria de Los Angeles - Littlehampton Book Services

The lady is well represented on CD, both in her 21 complete opera recordings and her many song recitals. The EMI video is a compilation of many different live performances and well worth buying. The book isn't especially well written but it is the only biography currently available and it is largely drawn from quotes by the lady. But it was written in the 1980's, so it's hardly up to date.

CLASS THREE

Joseph Schmidt

CD Joseph Schmidt - Bel Age

CD Joseph Schmidt - EMI

VIDEO DVD A Star Fell From Heaven - Bel canto Society

There is no English language biography currently available.

Schmidt, like Richard Tauber, made hundreds of recordings. The EMI disk includes many opera arias along with what is my all-time favorite recording of that old chestnut, "O Sole Mio." There are two Schmidt films currently available on DVD. The plots are dumb in both but "A Star Fell From Heaven" has better music. The other is his first film, "My Song Goes 'Round The World."

Richard Tauber

CD Opera Airs & Duets - EMI

CD Favorites Vol. 1 & 2 - Naxos Nostalgia

VIDEO DVD Forbidden Music - Bel Canto Society

Biography: Richard Tauber - Da Capo Press

There are innumerable Tauber CD's available. He made over 700 recordings. There is even a CD with all the selections conducted by Franz Lehar! Much of the popular music he recorded was terrible, but I think these disks show him at his best. All of Tauber's films had pretty stupid plots, but "Forbidden Music" is less so. If you can find it, his English-language "Pagliacci" isn't bad at all. The only English language biography of Tauber was written by his wife, Diana Napier and it's pretty good.

Franco Corelli

CD The Very Best of Franco Corelli - EMI

CD Opera Arias - EMI

VIDEO DVD Carmen & Pagliacci - Hardy Classics

Biography: Franco Corelli: Prince of Tenors - Hal Leonard Corp.

Corelli recorded exclusively for EMI and they have done a fine job here. Personally, I feel that he is far more effective when seen than when he is heard, but rabid Corelli fans will disagree with me.

Both the Carmen and the Pagliacci are 1955 black & white Italian TV productions. Which means flat sets and poor sound. But Corelli is at his freshest and most interesting.

Interesting? He's exciting to watch and his acting is as intense as you will ever see by an opera singer. If only he had kept that level of commitment. I haven't read "Prince of Tenors," but it has received excellent reviews.

CLASS FOUR

Marian Anderson

CD Marian Anderson Vol. 1 & 2 - Prima Voce

VIDEO DVD Marian Anderson: A Portrait In Music - VAI

Autobiography: Marian Anderson: A Singers Journey - Scribner

Most of Marian Anderson recordings were spirituals, but she did sing a few opera arias as well. Truthfully, her operatic material is more desirable for her voice than her interpretation - after all she never had a chance to test herself on stage, but Prima Voce gives a good assortment of each. Anderson's autobiography, like the lady herself, is dignified and somewhat withdrawn, but honest. There are two Video biographies of Marian Anderson currently. Portrait in Music is the less simplistic.

Leontyne Price

CD Arias from Verdi & Puccini - RCA

CD The Prima Donna Collection (4 Discs) - RCA

VIDEO DVD La Forza Del Destino - DGG

VIDEO DVD The Art of Leontyne Price: Bell Telephone Hour - VAI

Biographies: have been written, none that I would recommend.

RCA has never been known for the quality of its sound, but these CD's are pretty good and she only recorded for RCA. The "Forza" is a live performance and the Bell Telephone hour shows her in a 1958 Act III of "Aida" and 1963 and 1967 concerts. I've seen three or four biographies and they seem aimed at school children. You'd think an artist as important as Price would warrant a good critical biography. Maybe later.

Teresa Stratas

CD Stratas Sings Weill & The Unknown Kurt Weill - NonesuchCD

VIDEO VHS (DVD?) Stratasphere - Kultur

VIDEO DVD Cavalleria Rusticana/Pagliacci - DGG

Biography Stratas: An Affectionate Tribute - Oxford University Press

Not many stand-alone CD's by Stratas, although she can be found on complete opera sets both CD and DVD. "An Affectionate Tribute" is a combination interview-biography and fairly illuminating. Lotsa pictures, too. There are at least a dozen Stratas videos available.

"Stratasphere" is a 90-minute documentary and exceptionally good. Finding it on DVD maybe be a problem, tho. The Pagliacci has a sprightly Stratas and Domingo is actually interesting.

Shirley Verrett

CD In Opera - RCA

CD Carnegie Hall Recital - Sony

VIDEO DVD Samson et Dalilah with Jon Vickers - Kultur

Autobiography: I Never Walked Alone - John Wiley & Sons

For such a popular artist, it's odd that she only recorded one recital disk - and that one is filled out with a couple of arias from her complete opera sets, but it's worth having. There are two Samson et Dalilah's on DVD. One with Domingo and one with Vickers. The Vickers one is much better. Her autobiography is candid and honest - a rarity to be treasured.

CLASS FIVE

Jon Vickers

CD The Very Best Of Jon Vickers - EMI

Biography: Jon Vickers: A Hero's Life - University Press of New England

True to his often stated belief that performing arias outside the context of the opera itself elevated the performer above the music, Vickers made almost no recordings other than complete operas. "A Hero's Life" is an excellent, well-written, and clear-eyed view of a complex man.

Florence Quartararo

2-CD I Pagliacci & Arias - Guild

3-CD Florence Quartararo Unknown Recordings - Immortal Performances

There is no biography currently available.

Disk one of the Guild set offers Quartararo in a complete performance of "Pagliacci" with Ramon Vinay and disk two has her RCA recordings plus many radio performances.

The Immortal Performances all her currently available recordings - disk two of the Guild set plus two more CD's of just about all her known radio performances.

Monserrat Caballe

CD The Very Best of Monserrat Caballe (2-CD) - EMI

CD The Essential Monserrat Caballe - RCA

VIDEO DVD Monserrat Caballe - Bel Canto Society

Biography: Monserrat Caballe: Casta Diva - Northwestern

Caballe's best recordings are from the 1960's and 1970's which these two Cd's cover quite well. The Bel Canto DVD primarily uses video clips from the 1960's. The biography is good as far as it goes, but it was written in the 1980's so it is hardly up to date.

Claudia Muzio

CD Muzio - Nimbus

CD Complete Recordings (2-CD) 5 Volumes - Romophone

There is no English language biography currently available.

The Nimbus Cd has most of what you will want. The Romophones have everything she ever recorded and Ward Marston did the restorations, so the sound is excellent.

CLASS SIX

Beniamino Gigli

CD The Gigli Edition Vol. 1 - 6 - Naxos

Biography: The Memoirs of Beniamino Gigli - Cassell Publishers

The Naxos set covers just about all of Gigli's recordings. Pick and choose which disk you like. Gigli made many complete opera sets and, again, pick your favorite. Gigli's autobiography is of interest for his description of his early years. His memory becomes selective as time passes, but it's the only English-language book out there.

Fritz Wunderlich

CD The Very Best Of Fritz Wunderlich - EMI

CD Historical Recordings 1954 - 1965 - Musical Heritage Society

VIDEO DVD

VIDEO DVD The Barber of Seville (German Language) - ASIN

There is no English language biography currently available.

There are a lot of CD's to choose from and many CD's of complete operas. EMI's sound quality is very good. There is a DVD biography available but it isn't anything special.

Better to get "Barber of Seville" in glorious black & white with Herman Prey as Figaro.

Robert Merrill

Robert Merrill/Jussi Bjorling - Operatic Arias & Duets - RCA

CD Robert Merrill: Arias - Pearl

Autobiography: Between Acts - McGraw-Hill

Autobiography: Once More From The Beginning - Macmillan

The duets disk with Bjorling is a must-have classic. Otherwise there is very little available to choose from. The Pearl CD is good, but they have never been famous for their sound quality.

Ezio Pinza

CD Ezio Pinza - Prima Voce

CD Airs d'Opera - EMI

Autobiography: Ezio Pinza an Autobiography - Rinehart & Co.

Prima Voce is part of the Nimbus label and both companies make a real effort to offer superior sound quality. Pinza's autobiography is quite well written by his collaborator, although he carefully avoids any mention of his notorious womanizing.