Who makes it to the top of our list?

LISTS ARE FUN AREN'T THEY? EVEN THOUGH THEY'RE HIGHLY arbitrary and subjective they always cause controversy. You know, along the lines of "how could you possibly overlook such and such a person?" For the 'Classic CD 300' we asked our esteemed critics to nominate the century's most important singers, conductors and instrumentalists. The result is that this issue is a canary fancier's delight with our top 100 singers detailed over 14 pages and disc recommendations for each. With election-style fervour we have ranked our singers according to how many votes they secured. If you disagree with the order, or feel we have unforgivably omitted someone, then please write to us because we want to hear from you. As always with Classic CD, nothing about the ranking is safe and predictable – traditional do-no-wrong vocal sacred cows are often much further down the list than you might think. And you may be surprised to see some singers included at the expense of others. As one of the voters I was asked to nominate who I felt were the 25 most important singers of the century. What a task! I tried to be very impartial, eschewing some of my favourites for a broad range of singers who I feel have been pioneers in their fields – Fischer-Dieskau in art song, Maria Callas for theatrical immediacy, Cathy Berberian for avant-garde twentieth-century music. But it was agony leaving so many out and apologies to those many fine singers who I have enjoyed on stage and on disc but who didn’t quite make it onto the list. And besides this is where you come in. We want to compile a reader’s top 300 and in our last instalment in your September issue you will be asked to nominate your top three singers, conductors and instrumentalists. Meanwhile, do tell us what you think of our 100 singers. Without giving too much away I can tell you there are a few surprises. To find out in good old-fashioned reverse order the singers our critics cannot be without turn to page 32. And you can hear exactly why they are so special by listening to them at their best on your cover disc. Enjoy!

The Classic CD 300: Traditional do-no-wrong sacred cows (like Maria Callas?) can be much further down the list that you might think, p. 32

How the magazine and cover CD work

- Our reviews are direct, lively and authoritative, our features inform, entertain and keep you in touch with the music world.
  
  Uniquely, most of our features and the month’s top five reviews are illustrated by tracks on the cover disc.

- For balance and maximum enjoyment the Classic CD cover disc is compiled solely by us. We choose the music to illustrate our features while our critics advise us on the best extracts from new releases.
  
  Happy listening!

THE CLASSIC CD GUARANTEE

Classic CD is the essential buyer’s guide and the key to enjoying great music brilliantly performed on our own cover disc by the world’s best artists.
Singers of the Century

Time to find out who the Classic CD critics have voted as the finest singer of the century. We count down the top 100, explain why we rate them as the greatest and, for the top six, give a sample of each on the cover disc... but will you agree with the winner?

Four faces from the wide, wide world of Classic CD (clockwise from top left): Anoushka Shankar appears on disc with her father Ravi; Neville Marriner turns 75 this year, but explains why slowing down is out of the question; Andre Previn, as adept on the jazz keyboard as he is on the classical stage; Placido Domingo – where does he appear in our top 100 singers pole?

Next month's cover CD highlight:
The Greatest Conductors of the Century
10 GREATEST SINGERS
It's the kind of thing you might be asked when out for a drink after a night at the opera—"Who do you think ought to be remembered as the 20 greatest singers of the century?" Well, it's precisely the question we put to two dozen of our leading critics (and fortunately we weren't at the pub so we didn't have to get a round in). After pooling the hundreds of votes and arguing over level-pegging artists, Classic CD presents a near-definitive guide to the 100 greatest singers of the century. Any disagreement? Good, we want to hear from you! And next month, we'll have the top 100 conductors...

CONTRIBUTORS

July 1999 (Issue 41) 29
100
NAT KING COLE
American pianist and singer, 1917-65
Blessed with perfect pitch, Cole was a brilliant all-round musician. An innovator and influential jazz pianist in his early days, it is his mellow, liquid baritone voice and easy television manner for which he will be remembered. Instantly recognizable, often imitated, never equaled in its blend of warmth and sincerity, the voice reflects the man himself. Unforgettable he certainly is.
Terry Williams
Recommended recording:
The Best Of... (Capitol 7243 4 97483 2)
99
KIRI TE KANAWA
New Zealand lyric soprano, b1944
Arguably the most beloved and successful lyric soprano of the past two decades, Kiri's glamorous looks and ravishing, creamy voice have endeared her to audiences around the world. Particularly successful in Mozart, the Italian repertoire and Richard Strauss, less so in her cross-over ventures.
Jeremy Nicholas
Recommended recording:
Philips Classics 434 723-2
98
JOSE CARRERAS
Spanish tenor, b1946
Equipped with a light, lyrically supple, sweetly attractive timbre, an unmatched sensitivity to text and a beguiling vulnerability, Carreras is the most commercially successful of the Three Tenors with countless selling 30 million discs. Reporters is a wide (including considerable crossover success) but he is at his best in the great operatic romances, Verdi's Don Carlos and Puccini's Tosca especially.
Michael Quinn
Recommended recording:
Euter Carmen (DG 410 088-2)
97
MARGARET PRICE
Welsh lyric soprano, b1941
Early in her career Margaret Price established herself as one of the finest Mozart sopranos of her generation. But since then her firm and even voice, creamy rich as well as pure, has served her well in Verdi, Puccini, Bellini and Wagner. Often called a 'heroic' or

WHICH COUNTRY HAS THE MOST SONGS OF THE CENTURY?

[Image]

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WHICH COUNTRY HAS THE MOST SONGS OF THE CENTURY?

[Image]
82 SIMON KEENLYSIDE
British lyric baritone, b.1959
Simon Keenlyside (born London) is the outstanding British Lieder recitalist of today and the finest British singer in Schubert and Schumann, with a lyric baritone voice which is warm and used with great subtlety and immaculate taste. Keenlyside is also much in demand as an opera singer and, with his boy-next-door looks, he’s the Petraham and Billy Budd of one’s dreams. His discography is substantial and includes three solo discs of Lieder by Schubert, Strauss and Schumann.
Adrian Jack
Recommended recording: Schubert: Lieder Recital (Hyperion CDU33102)

81 HEDDLE NASH
British tenor, 1886–1961
Heddle Nash was the outstanding British lyric tenor of his time. He studied in Milan and made his London debut as the Duke in Verdi’s Rigoletto. His singing was sweet and charming, and with a graceful sense of line which sounds a model of old-world courtesy to modern ears. Nash was equally admired in Handel and Mozart. His ardent interpretation of Elgar’s Gerontius became legendary and can be heard on a complete recording of the oratorio, with Sargent conducting, on Testament.
Adrian Jack
Recommended recording: Various (Dutton CDU7012)

84 GIULIETTA SIMONIATI
Italian mezzo-soprano, b.1910
Simoniati was one of Italy’s best mezzos throughout an international career of more than 30 years. Her full, rich voice took well to roles ranging from Cherubino (Figaro) to Rosina, Azucena and Amneris. Her stage personality was equally strong, dramatically intense, but bubbling with comic charm.
Michael Scott Rohan
Recommended recording: Aida, Karajan (Decca 414 367-2)

85 GIOVANNI MARTINELLI
Italian tenor, 1885–1969
A trumpet-toned tenor, shining brass to Caruso’s bronze, and hugely exciting in the big Verdi roles in which he excelled. He made his début at 25 (in Verdi’s Ernani) and made his last stage appearance (as the Emperor Atulom in Puccini’s Turandot) at the age of 82. Not long before that he recorded the last act solo from Puccini’s La Fanciulla del West with a ringing vehemence and moving expressiveness that capture the electricity of his great years.
Michael Oliver
Recommended recording: Martineili (Nimbus Prima Voce 7004)

80 IAN BOSTRIDGE
British tenor, b.1950
Bostridge’s intellectually-underpinned delivery of song (Britten, Hahn), lieder (Schubert, Schumann) and all too rarely opera (A Midsummer Night’s Dream; The Rake’s Progress) has made him the thinking woman’s tenor. Performances are characterised by a concentrated intensity, measured precision of delivery, skillfully detailed dramatic characterisation and a rapt emotional integrity.
Michael Quinn
Recommended recording: Schubert: Die schöne Müllerin (Hyperion CDU30025)

79 ANGELA GHEORGHIU
A sensaional Covent Garden début as Verdi’s Violetta catapulted Gheorghiu to stardom overnight five years ago. Everything since has been full of high-octane, hi-energy promise, the voice rich, intense, secure in line, beautifully proportioned and deliciously emotional in a way that only Callas could match. A huge, passionate bel canto talent.
Michael Quinn
Recommended recording: Verdi: La Traviata (Decca 448 119-2)

78 LUISA TETRAZZINI
Italian coloratura soprano, 1871–1940
With a marginally less beautiful voice than Melba, Tetrazzini was a colouratura miracle from an age that spawned many such sopranos. Her technique was devastatingly good, with effortless floating high notes that are such a hallmark of the golden age. Phrasing was seamless, and she was no stranger to the odd liberty when display can be enhanced.
Simon Trezise
Recommended recording: The complete Zonophone and Victor recordings (Rhomophone 81025-2)

77 ANNE-SOFIE VON OTTER
Swedish mezzo-soprano, b.1955
Von Otter is a true Lieder singer, her mezzo-soprano less ideal for opera or even the concert hall, though she works in both. She has a bright sound and clear diction, and a beautiful tone. Her partnership with pianist Bengt Forsberg has produced a fine series of recordings.
Andy Hamilton
Recommended recording: Schubert songs (DG)

76 THOMAS ALLEN
British baritone, b.1944
The greatest Don Giovanni of his generation, Allen simply exudes masculine and musical potency on stage with his seductive, dark-hued, tonsorially firm, strongly projected voice. Agile, too, with Rossini’s Figaro and Mozart’s Papageno lightly sketched and delightfully mischievous. Particularly expressive in English and French song and, increasingly on disc in American musicals.
Michael Quinn
Recommended recording: Mozart: Don Giovanni (EMI Cl 74707-2)

75 ANDREAS SCHOLL
German counter-tenor, b.1966
With a vibrant, honey-warm, clarion-bright, angelically pure voice Scholl marries beauty, brain and brown to simply stunning, heart-stopping effect. Peerless primo uomo of the new counter-tenor generation, he excels in Handel, with strong showings on disc of Dowland and English folk song and an exquisite Vivaldi Stabat Mater.
Michael Quinn
Recommended recording: Heroes (Decca 468 196-2)

74 MIRELLA FRENCH
Italian lyric-soprano, b.1935
Arguably the finest Mimì (Ètoile) and Violetta (Traviata) of modern times, the great Modenese soprano, Mirella Freni, coincidentally shared the same wet nurse as Pavarotti, and their respective mothers even worked in the same cigarette factory! She is an artist of incomparable charm and mesmerising vocal artistry.
Julian Haylock
Recommended recording: Puccini La bohème (Decca 421 042-2)

73 LJUBA WELTSCH
Bulgarian dramatic soprano, 1913–98
Bulgarian, Ljuba Weltch made almost as much impression with her red hair and fiery temperament, sensual stage presence as her powerful, silvery soprano, gawainlessly in roles such as Aida, Tosca, and above all Salome, Singing and acting with total commitment, she largely exhausted her voice by the 1980s.
Michael Scott Rohan
Recommended recording: Weltch: The Complete Columbia Recordings (Sony 476 9266)
72
ELISABETH SODERSTROM
Swedish lyric/dramatic soprano, b. 1927
Probably the most distinguished singer-actress of her generation, with a special gift for conveying suffering. Her wide-ranging voice encompassed a huge repertory, from light lyric roles to Ellen Orford, the Marschallin, Janacek's heroines and even Falstaff.
Michael Scott Rohan
Recommended recording: The Mikado or Case/Markkridge (Decca 430-372-2)

71
ILEANA COTRUBAS
Romanian lyric soprano, b. 1939
Ileana Cotrubas was renowned for the beauty of her voice but also for the subtlety and taste of her acting in both comic and tragic roles. Her greatest roles include Susanna in Mozart’s Marriage of Figaro to which she brought wit and warmth, Debussy's Melisande and most famously Violetta in La traviata which, with her fragile and affecting presence, became her signature role.
Neil Evans
Recommended recording: Verdi La traviata (DG 415 132-2)

70
NELLY MELBA
Melba belongs to the golden age of singing – the late Victorian period. Few sopranos have ever conveyed greater ease or pleasure in singing. Her technique is so perfect that rapid coloratura sounds like an act of nature, and a simple melody carries the ear into the most extraordinary way.
Simon Trezise
Recommended recording: Nellie Melba (various songs and arias) (Nimbus Primavera Voice NIP 7693)

69
ANTON DEMOTA
Yugoslav tenor, 1910-98
Anton Demota excelled at the lighter end of the Austrian-German operatic repertoire. His Bach and Mozart were particularly special: few tenors match the fluidity of his voice production and the heady beauty of his tone.
Terry Blain
Recommended recording: Anton Demota (Preiser 90022)

68
EMMY DESTINN
Czech dramatic soprano, 1878-1930
The legendary Emmy Destinn was the most commanding soprano of the early part of the century. Her strong, luminous timbre shines through the heavy highline surfaces, and the glowing strength and melting warmth of her singing explains the hold she had over audiences.
Greatness is more easily recognised than defined but her vocal presence leaves no doubt as to her stature.
Robert Layton
Recommended recording: Mozart, Weber, Puccini, Verdi areas (Pearl Mone GRMCD 08172)

67
PETER SCHREIER
German tenor, b. 1935
One of the finest of all Wagner singers, Peter Schreier is also a distinguished operatic tenor. His rare sensitivity and commanding intelligence combined with a ringing voice of breathtaking emotional range make him the archtypical modern German tenor.
Julian Haylock
Recommended recording: Schubert Die schöne Müllerin (Decca 430 414-2)

66
JESSYE NORMAN
American lyric-dramatic soprano (b1945)
Although she made her operatic début singing Wagner, Jessye Norman has pursued an eclectic path ranging from Purcell to Schoenberg, both composers unsupervised recipients of that capacious well-uphoshoned voice with its fruity bottom and abundant generosity. For all the power, however, she is blessed with magnificent pianissimos, and with guidance from Pierre Boulez has cultivated a productive soft spot for the French repertoire.
Paul Riley
Recommended recording: Berlioz Nuits d'Elis (Philips 412 490-2)

65
ELLY AMELING
Dutch lyric soprano, b. 1938
An amazing 40 years before making her operatic début, Elly Ameling has almost exclusively concentrated her career on the intimate world of “art song”. Blessed with a voice of ravishing purity and immaculate intonation, hers is one of the most exquisite talents you will encounter this side of perfection.
Julian Haylock
Recommended recording: Schubert 24 songs (Hyperion Edition Vol. 7) (Hyperion CDJ 33007)

64
LOUIS ARMSTRONG
American trumpeter and singer, 1901-71
Quite apart from his immense influence as a trumpet and band leader, the unique sound of “Satchmo’s” gravel voice secured his legendary status. The relaxed phrasing and delivery of his late, great hits “Hello, Dolly” and “What a Wonderful Life” were as much loved as the “scat” style he popularised earlier.
Barbara Hammond
Recommended reading: Hot Fives and Hot Sevens (ASC 5171)

63
MONTSE Serrat CABALLE
Spanish lyric soprano, b. 1923
Montserrat Caballe had the most ravishingly beautiful soprano voice of her generation, and her technique was quite faultless. She excelled in bel canto with seamless legato and phrasing, but was also a fine Mozartean and a touching Puccini heroine. She was sometimes criticized for bigness, for letting lovely sounds do duty for vocal acting, but this underrates both her intelligence and her often vivid expressiveness.
Michael Oliver
Recommended recording: Verdi Aida (EMI CDCS 562-462)

62
CONCHITA SUPERVIA
Spanish mezzo-soprano, 1895-1936
The irrepressible personality and vocal joie de vivre of this adora bile mezzo soprano spills exuberantly on to her records, though made over 70 years ago. Technical virtuosity, incomparable diction, a vibrant tone, wide range and innate musicality made her exceptional in Rossini and one of the great Cammers.
Jeremy Nicholas
Recommended recording: BMI CD 1.634492; Preiser 90023

61
GIUSEPPE DI STEFANO
Italian tenor, b. 1921
Perhaps the most sought-after operatic tenor of the 1950s, di Stefano was Callas’s chosen male lead in many of her famous recordings. Unfortunately, his career nosedived when he began taking roles too heavy for him. But as an ardent Cavadarossi in Tosca he is just about ideal. Fortunately, there is much recorded evidence of his exciting, dashing style as an operatic hero.
Terry Williams
Recommended recording: Giuseppe di Stefano Sings Opera Arias and Songs (BMI CDM7 63105-2)

60
MARILYN HORME
American mezzo-soprano, b. 1934
Dorothy Dandridge may dazzle with her sultry screen presence in the 1954 film Carmen Jones, but it is the 20-year-old Marilyn Horne doing all the singing. In the same year she started on her operatic career, debuting as Isla in Smetana’s Rheingold Brinde, to much acclaim. Rich in timbre and possessing a thrillingly secure upper register, she epitomises: “the art of bel canto”. She made splendid operatic discs, some of the most memorable with Sutherland, for whom she is the perfect foil.
Terry Williams
Recommended recording: Decca 431 881-2

59
EMMA KIRKBY
British lyric soprano, b. 1949
A fresh, vital, unadulterated and porcelain-delicate voice delivered with genuine feeling and an admirably restrained use of vibrato has made
58

ELLA FITZGERALD
American jazz singer, 1918-67
Famed for "scatting", virtuoso improvisations using wordless sounds or off-the-cuff lyrics, her most enduring achievement will probably be the "straight" recordings of classic American popular song: Porter, Berlin, Kern etc. Her singing never lost its elegant phrasing or its vibrant warmth.
Barry Withereden
Recommended recording:
Best of the Songbooks
(Verve V 10804)

55

BILLIE HOLIDAY
American Blues singer, 1915-59
Holiday's deprived childhood and constant drug abuse which, predictably, resulted in her untimely death, also lent an emotional intensity to her natural talent for singing the blues. Her unique style brought about her first recording session with Benny Goodman in 1933.
Barbara Hammond
Recommended recording:
Songs for Distingué Lovers
(Verve V 539056-2)

54

IRMGARD SEEFRIED
German lyric soprano, 1919-88
Irmgard Seefried was a German soprano who spent most of her working life at the Vienna State Opera. She specialised in Mozart and Richard Strauss, which she sang with incomparable naturalness and charm. She also was a delightful lieder singer, with a spontaneity which had enormous appeal. Her voice remained glistening until late. She retired in 1976.
Michael Tanner
Recommended recording:
Mozart The Magic Flute
(EMI CHS 5 65526-2)

56

NICOLAI GEDDA
Swedish tenor, b 1925
Nicolai Gedda was one of the most versatile tenors of the 1950s and 1960s, ranging from baroque and Italian opera to Mozart, Berioz and even lighter Wagner (Luungrin). His voice was typically clear-toned and Scandinavian in technique impeccable, with a diaphanous, stylish manner that lent itself equally to Mozart and opera. Michael Scott Rohan
Recommended recording:
Berlioz
Verdisotto
Carmen Diary
(Philips 416 955-2)

53

GERHARD HUCH
German baritone, 1901-84
Apart from the extraordinarily lyrical quality of the voice, Gerhard Huch was an artist of great musical and dramatic intelligence, whether as Papageno in Beauchamp's pro-war Magic Flute or as an interpreter of lieder. To Schubert, Wolf and Klippenstein he brought a sense of characterisation and beauty of line which was peerless.
Robert Layton
Recommended recording:
Schubert Songs, Die Schoene Mullerin

57

PAUL ROBESON
American bass, 1898-1976
Pure-voiced: Kirkby

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London Symphony no. 184
Vivaldi: cello Concertos

SONS AND SONS reveal new releases each quarter.
48

CECILIA BARTOLI
Italian mezzo-soprano, b1956

Now the best-selling female opera singer in the world, her charismatic stage presence and natural acting skills are allied to one of the most brilliant coloratura techniques ever heard. Vocal range of warmth and expressiveness, especially noted for her Rossini roles, is now investigating roles from the Baroque.

Adrian Jack
Recommended recording:
Rossini Heroines (Decca 435 075-2-2)

51

SUZANNE DANCO
Belgian lyric soprano, b1911

Suzanne Danco was the outstanding lyric soprano in French music during the period immediately after the Second World War. She was the heroine in Ansermet's first recording of Debussy's opera Pelléas et Mélisande and she also appeared on his recording of François Ruperraut's Le Roi Daudet. With a perfectly clear, flexible voice and a flawless technique, Danco’s repertoire was wide, ranging from Mozart to the part of Made in Pergolesi’s Deux frères. Adrian Jack
Recommended recording:
Great Voices of the Fillers, Vol. 2 (Decca London 449 151-2/LA)

50

EVA TURNER
British soprano, 1892-1990

Turner had one of the most powerful soprano voices between the wars years. Indeed, the sheer strength of her voice caused recording engineers much grief. Turandot is perhaps her most distinguished achievement; in “In questa reggia” we encounter the full majesty of her impeccable technique and infinitely memorable soundworld.

Simon Trolz
Recommended recording:
Various (Camerion CD WS2/50-50)

49

LAWRENCE TIBBETT
American baritone, 1896-1960

The outstanding baritone of the inter-war years, particularly noted for his performances in Verdi and the Italian repertoire. A fine-looking man and an accomplished actor, he also appeared in films and light opera.

Jeremy Nicholas
Recommended recording:
The Emperor Tibbett (Pearl GEMM CDS9463)

47

ROSA PONSELLE
American soprano, 1897-1981

Rosa Ponselle started out in vaudeville, then, in 1918, was catapulted onto the Metropolitan stage opposite Caruso in Verdi’s La Forza del Destino. A star was born; Rich, flexible and alluring, her voice was likened to “puro gold”.

Terry Blain
Recommended recording:
Operas and Songs Recital (Nimbus Nimbus N7065)

46

ENZIO PINZA
Italian bass, 1892-1957

Pinza was a great example of the noble-voiced Italian basso cantante, his dramatic gifts (he was a fine actor and a strikingly handsome man) never impeding his flawless tenor. He had a vast repertory of over 100 roles despite never having learned to read music properly. His appearance as well as his aristocratic voice (both survived long enough for him to make a successful second career on Broadway, notably in South Pacific) made him ideal as Mozart’s Don Giovanni, but he was perhaps still more memorable in the great Verdi bass roles.

Michael Oliver
Recommended recording:
Enzo Pinza (Nimbus Prime Voice N1 78158)

45

CARLO BERGONZI
Italian tenor, b1924

Carlo Bergonzi was the most stylish and refined operatic tenor of his time in the Italian repertoire. He first sang at La Scala, Milan, in 1963 and appeared the same year in Verdi’s La forza del destino in London. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s he sang regularly at Covent Garden and the Met.

Adrian Jack
Recommended recording:
Various Tenor Arias (Belart 450 000-2)

Bartoli: best-selling magic

44

RICHARD TAUBER
German lyric tenor, 1891-1945

The name Richard Tauber conjures up a picture of the debonair, be-mourning, evening-suited man-about-town. But in his earlier days, he was a renowned opera singer, taking on all the leading tenor roles at the Dresden Opera and the Vienna State Opera, with Mozart operas his specialty. Described as “the foremost lyric tenor of the inter-war years” his voice has “warmth, elegance, grace and perfect inflection”.

Terry Williams
Recommended recording:
Various (Pearl GEMM CDS 9327)

43

LUCIA POPP
Czech coloratura/lyric soprano, 1909-93

Lucia Popp shot to stardom with her dazzling “Queen of the Night,” a more spine-tingling, technically spot-on portrayal you are unlikely to hear. In the opera house, her warm, natural acting ability and often coquetish charm make her the ideal Despina. Although best remembered for her vocal pyrotechnics, she is equally at home in the more intimate demands of leder.

Terry Williams
Recommended recording:
Decca (417 129-2)

42

CATHY BERBERIAN
An inspiration to sometime husband Barbi and to Cage, amongst others, Berberian was also a composer in her own right. She was famed for her facility in avant-garde and experimental music, and for her great dramatic presence. The timbre of her voice was as individual as her range was astounding.

Barry Witharden
Recommended recording:
Barbi Songs (Bravaiservies 10017)

41

PIERRE BERNAC
French baritone, 1899-1979

Pierre Bernac was the greatest French baritone of the mid-century and a supreme stylist. His effortless control of line and subtlety of vocal colour made him the ideal interpreter of Poulenc, who composed many song-cycles for him, and one of the most magisterial exponents of Debussy and Ravel.

Robert Layton
Recommended recording:
“The Essential Pierre Bernac” Testament mono (SBT 31061)

40

JAMES BOWMAN
British counter-tenor (b1941)

The leading counter-tenor of the second half of the century. James Bowman did much to revive interest in the high male voice. By performing and recording the roles which earlier had been sung by contraltos and mezzo-soprano like Kathleen Ferrier he worked hard in hand with the authentic movement. With a more powerful voice than most counter-tenors he created roles in operas by Tippett, Maxwell Davies and Britten.

Neil Evans
Recommended recording:
Handel Heroic Arias (Hyperion CDA 66480)

39

GOTTLIEB FRICK
German bass, 1896-94

Frick was famous for his singing of Wagner bass roles, especially Hunding and Hagen in The Ring, Gunther in Parsifal and Pogner in Meistersinger. He had the blackest of voices, though it was also very beautiful, and could be6
carefully sung as well as bawdily.

Michael Tanner
Recommended recording:
Mozart: Die Entführung aus dem Serail/Beethoven (EMI CMS 7 59715-2)

38

GERAINT EVANS
Welsh baritone, 1922-92

Geraint Evans made his Covent Garden and Glyndebourne debuts in the late 1940s, from whence his popularity as both musician and actor in such roles as Falstaff, Figaro, and Posa ono brought him international exposure.

Barbara Hammond
Recommended recording:
“Great Mozart Singers Series”, Vol. 4 (Orfeo CMS440418)

LUCIA POPP: adorable Czech soprano
37 JOHN MCCORMACK
Irish tenor, 1864-1945
John McCormack was the archetypal Irish tenor, sweet-toned and beefy of frame, but with a mellow artistry that won the admiration of his rival Enrico Caruso. No actor, he relied on his elegant Italianate phrasing to create character, and retired early from the stage to become a recording giant.
Recommended recording:
John McCormack – recital (HMV 2096).

35 FRIEDRICH SCHÖRER
Hungarian bass-baritone (1886-1953)
Raising like a phoenix from the ashes of the First World War the bass-baritone Friedrich Schorr dominated the Wagnerian bass scene for two decades. Schorr was tall, imposing and vocally majestic. He took the humanity of Hans Sachs as firmly in his stride as the doom-laden psychology of Wotan – whose farewell to his errant daughter Brunnhilde was unique in its blend of heroic grandeur and deep compassion.
Geoffrey Crankshaw
Recommended recording:
Wagner Arias (Preiser 90266).

34 FRIDA LEIDER
German dramatic soprano, 1888-1975
Three sopranos dominate the heroic-soprano repertoire between the wars – Flagstad, Leider and Lawrence. Each has her own distinctive qualities, Leider’s being a remarkable vocal technique and intensely dramatic style.
Simon Trewise
Recommended recording:
Scenes from Götterdämmerung (Preiser 90266).

33 BRYN TERFEL
Welsh bass-baritone, b.1965
Early competition success at Cardif has provided Terfel’s meteoric rise to pre-eminence with a suitably patriotic launch pad. A versatile singer, physically as well as musically, he dominates the operatic stage, but he is a commanding recitativo too whose innate authority, willingness to take risks and richly modulated expressive palate makes the familiar sound fresh.
Paul Riley
Recommended recording:
English songs (DG 445946-2).

32 GUNDULA JANowitz
German lyric soprano, b.1937
Janowitz is one of the best post-war examples of a distinctive type of German soprano voice. Much of her finest work was with Karajan, who clearly loved her creamy and pure tone. She could construct ravishing lines high above the orchestral line in Strauss; her Four Last Songs is especially memorable, as is her more intimate set of Schubert Lieder.
Simon Trewise
Mozart: La notte di Figaro (DG Originals 449 729-2).

36 LISA DELLA CASA
Swiss soprano, b.1919
Lisa della Casa sang much of the same repertoire as Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, to whom she provided a simpler, less mannered alternative. Her lyric soprano was clear, honest, and innocent, and she was considered the outstanding interpreter of Strauss’s Arabella, of which there are two versions on CD, with Solti (1957) and Kallberg (1963). Della Casa’s beauty and personal charm matched her voice, and she was a naturally radiant Marschall in Der Rosenkavalier and Figaro Countess.
Adrian Jack
Recommended Recording:
Recital (EMI Classics S 66671 2).

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31
REGINE CREDCHIN
French lyric/dramatic soprano, b.1937
Mesmer of the grand French style, Credchin's debut role was Elisa in Wagner's Lohengrin (in French), and Bayreuth soon saw her potential for heavier Wagner roles. But she brought to them the qualities that distinguished her great French heroines: purity of line, womanly dignity and subtle expressiveness. Her greatest role was one in which her French heritage and her Wagnerian experience could fuse in a memorable and moving portrayal: the Marschallin in Strauss's Der Rosenkavalier.

Michael Oliver
Recommended recording: Strauss: Der Rosenkavalier (Decca 417 493-2)

30
JON VICKERS
Canadian helden tenor, b.1926
A tortured Otello, a near-demented Tristan, a Handel and Schubert singer of rare intensity, tenor Jon Vickers was all of these and more. Sometimes raw and idiosyncratic in diction, psychological acuity was the keynote of his interpretations. Britten hailed his Grimes, others found it astonishingly penetrating. Canada's greatest-ever vocal export?

Terry Blain
Recommended recording: Britten Peter Grimes (Philips Duo 462 847-2)

29
JOAN SUTHERLAND
Australian coloratura soprano, b.1928
The century's finest coloratura soprano who made many of the great roles of Bellini, Massenet, Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini her own. With her agile, rich and firm voice capable of effortless and thrilling top notes she was a natural Handelian. She sang in London the first performances of his Achi? in 200 years before conquering the opera world in one night in 1959 with her performance of Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor at Covent Garden. None of this voice type has rivaled her in range of roles, in vocal stamina and sheer size of voice.

Nail Evans
Recommended recording: Vanessa (Decca 458 209-2)

28
BRIGITTE FASSBAENDER
German mezzo-soprano, b.1939
Happy to perform mostly in Munich, both as an opera singer and in Lieder recitals.

TRAGICALLY SHORT CAREERS
Fritz Wunderlich – died after falling down stairs
Kathleen Ferrier – died of cancer

37
LEONYTTE PRICE
American dramatic soprano, b.1927
With her dark, smoky and sultry voice, Price became one of the leading dramatic sopranos, excelling in Puccini and Verdi, especially as his Aida. Her superb musicianship, beauty and fine acting kept her a natural novelty for roles like Cleopatra in Barber's opera. She is also a great interpreter of spirituals.

Neil Evans
Recommended recording: Verdi Aida (Decca 417 416-2)

26
GERARD SOUZAY
French baritone, 1920
A pupil of the great Pierre Bernac, Souzay carried forward the master's chauvinism of French repertoire, expanding successfully into German Lied territory. Schubert in particular. An even more elegant and finished stylist than Bernac, Souzay's voice typifies the airy graceful nature of the French baritone to virtual perfection.

Terry Blain
Recommended recording: Souzay in French Songs (Philips 416 964-2)

25
BIRGIT NILSSON
Swedish dramatic soprano, b.1918
It was in the mid 1950s that Birgit Nilsson started to forge a Brunnhilde destined to run 'rings around most of the opposition' – and Bayreuth swiftly consummated her reputation as the heilige to Flagstad. She was a formidable Isolde who combined steely brilliance and a razor-sharp top with unassailed technical accomplishment and an enquiring musical insight.

Paul Riley
Recommended recording: Götterdämmerung (Philips 412 489-2)

24
RENA TEBALDI
Italian dramatic soprano, b.1922
Renata Tebaldi had one of the most beautiful soprano voices on record. She shot to fame in 1949, and had a long career, devoted to the central Italian repertoire, though she was not at her best in Verdi. The notorious rivalry with Callas was concerned with lovely vocalising versus dramatic intensity, but later Tebaldi improved as a singing actress.

Michael Tanner
Recommended recording: Puccini La bohème (Decca 440 233-2)

19
LUCIANO PAVAROTTI
Italian tenor, b.1935
With his huge open-air concerts Pavarotti is certainly the most popular tenor of his generation. His work in bringing opera to such numerous audiences worldwide would be enough to ensure his place in any list of the century's greatest singers. But he is blessed with a pure, effortless tenor voice with thrilling high notes and he has become vocally if not dramatically the outstanding interpreter of Verdi, Puccini and Donizetti roles.

Paul Riley
Recommended recording: Turandot (Decca 443 204-2)

18
LAURITZ MELCHIOR
Danish helden tenor, 1909–1973
Melchior is famous because he has so far been the one, almost perfect solution to the Heldentenor problem. For sheer power, stamina, musical intelligence, and a voice that sounded beautiful even in the final ecstatic throes of Siegfried, the longest of Wagner's ordeals for
17

ELISABETH SCHWARZKOPF
German lyric soprano, b1915
As her husband and partner in all things musical, Walter Legge masterminded Schwarzkopf’s career, particularly in recording. Purely as sound, her voice was one of the most beautiful this side of heaven, famous for its ability to float effortlessly in the ether. She is matchless in German Lieder, and her portrayal of Strauss’s Marschallin is legendary.
Terry Williams
Recommended recording:
Four Last Songs (EMI Ref C01 781001-2)

16

FIODOR CHALIAPIN
Russian bass, 1873–1938
Fiodor Chaliapin was, together with Caruso and Calas, one of the three supreme operatic artists of the century. He was a complete performer, paying as much attention to make-up as to acting and singing, which were all used for dramatic ends. Thanks to his incomparable performances as Boris Godunov the opera has achieved its deserved place in the repertoire; recorded ‘live’ at Covent Garden in 1928, his account of the role is scarcely credible. His extensive repertoire included roles written for him, such as Massenet’s Don Quichotte.
Michael Tanner
Recommended recording:
Mussorgsky: Excerpts from Boris Godunov (Heveler 90965)

15

ELISABETH SCHUMANN
German lyric soprano, 1885–1963
A voice of pure silver, and an artistic personality that could range from delicious humour to poignant vulnerability, she is best-remembered for Lieder recordings, of Schubert especially. But she was a definitive, rapturous Sophie in Strauss’s Der Rosenkavalier and a bewitching exponent of Mozart’s soubrette roles.
Michael Oliver
Recommended recording:
Strauss: Der Rosenkavalier (EMI CHS 764487-2)

14

JANET BAKER
British mezzo-soprano, b1933
Musically impeccable, theatrically intuitive, emotionally direct, fiercely intelligent, Baker’s command of the repertoire from the Baroque to Britten was supreme. The human grandeur of her Handel vehicles remains unsurpassed, her Dido reigns supreme. Equally at ease in Mahler and French melodies, her partnership with Barbirolli and the Hallé was British musicianship at its most eloquent.
Michael Quinn
Recommended Recording: Elgar The Dream of Gerontius (EMI CDM 753165-2)

13

VICTORIA DE LOS ANGELES
Spanish lyric soprano, b1923
As enchanting for her sunny personality and charm as for the purity of her voice, Los Angeles was the acknowledged mistress of Spanish song, but had a surprisingly wide operatic repertoire, from Massenet’s Manon and Bizet’s Carmen to Puccini’s Suor Angelica and Mimi in La bohème. Her art was an intimate and subtle one; she could touch the heart with her sincerity and that quite uninstaltable voice of pale but warm gold.
Michael Oliver
Recommended recording:
Puccini: Suor Angelica (EMI CMS 75 4165-2)

12

LOTTE LEHMANN
German soprano, 1886–1976
One of the greatest and best-loved singers of the century, Lehmann was especially associated with Strauss’s Marschallin in Der Rosenkavalier to which she brought aristocratic stage presence. She created the Strauss roles of the Comtesse in Ariadne auf Naxos and Christine in Intermezzo and was an extremely accomplished song recitalist and teacher.
Neil Evans
Recommended recording:
Strauss Songs (EMI CDS 75 644 87-2)

II.

BENIAMINO GIGLI
Italian tenor, 1890–1957
Coming to the fore in the 1930s and enjoying a long career, Gigli set new standards of Italian singing. He refused to belt out everything at the top of his voice. His piano and mezzo-voce singing was a dream of tonal beauty and he loved the traditional songs of his country and yet excelled in every genre.
Geoffrey Crankshaw
Recommended recording:
Vera: Arias (CH 7610 51-2)

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the great opera houses. From Karajan she rejoiced; she learnt her "beauty of phrasing", from Böhm her fidelity to note values, and from Bernstein "the depth of meaning of the music". The three influences nicely summarise the attributes of her lovely singing.

**Simon Trezise**

**Recommended recording:**

Oreste Luigi A 70th Birthday Tribute, The Classic, 1994

Recordings (Streussa, Gluck, Rossini, Wagner) (RCA 09203 6951 3 2)

**9. HANS HOTTER**

German bass baritone, b:1909

Hans Hotter was the dominant Wagnerian bass-baritone of the post-war years, but also a distinguished lieder artist. Born in Bavaria, he showed such vocal promise that he made his stage debut as Sarastro at only 21, and in Wagner roles including Sachs and the Wanderer in Siegfried only a year later. Considered "politically unsound" by the Nazis, he began his true international career in Covent Garden. His first job was in Wagner performances in 1948 (in English) in becoming a regular until the mid-1960s. In 1953 he sang the three Wotan roles at the revived Bayreuth Festival, and through the world, recording Siegfried and Die Walküre in the first complete Ring under Solti.

His voice was large, though not overwhelming, with a distinctive slightly hollow tone, but capable of immense warmth and subtlety, and allied to towering height, aquiline features and unusual acting ability. His lieder singing was much more fluent than the detailed Fischer-Dieskau style than dominant, but with no less genuine sensitivity to words. He was often handicapped by acute hay-fever, and later developed a drastic wobble above the stave, but remained a commanding, moving artist. He coached other great Wotans, including David Ward and James Morris. Even into his 90s he has continued to perform roles such as the Speaker in Schoenberg's Gurrelieder.

**Michael Scott Rohan**

**Recommended recording:**

Siegfried/Sold (Decca 455 555-2)

**10. CHRISTA LUDWIG**

German mezzo-soprano, b:1936

Categorisation of singers is a dangerous but necessary occupation. Ludwig is officially a mezzo, in that the real meat of her voice lies somewhat lower then that of a genuine soprano. Her Mahler songs, for instance, reveal the deep, rich, vibrant area of her lower voice (the earlier EMI recordings, 1959-64, are especially glorious), in spite of this, many of her better-known roles are actually soprano parts. Who can ever forget her Leonore in the great Klemperer recording of Fidelio? It was as if she had been designed for the role, for how many others have so successfully brought the wondrously and the heroic (both understood in the nineteenth-century sense) so movingly together. Her astonishing 1954 recordings for RCA have her singing the Immolation from Götterdämmerung, among other soprano war-horses, and only the most critical listener would observe or be troubled by a marginal loss of security in the higher reaches.

Like Björling, Ludwig came from a musical background. Her first contract was in Gelsen, Germany in 1945, and she has performed in most of the major opera houses. From Karajan she rejoiced; she learnt her "beauty of phrasing", from Böhm her fidelity to note values, and from Bernstein "the depth of meaning of the music". The three influences nicely summarise the attributes of her lovely singing.

**7. ENRICO CARUSO**

Italian dramatic tenor, 1873-1921

Enrico Caruso was the first great singer to make a world-wide reputation through recordings. For many listeners, even those who never heard him, he was and remains the tenor to whom all others are compared. His voice was rich, while and distinctly baritonal: when a bass singer the role of Colline in Puccini's La bohème was taken II during a performance, Caruso had no difficulty in singing his Act 5 "Cheat Song" in the original key. He had the heroic timbre and singing top register that the great Italian hero roles need, but with an exquisite and sensitive control of quieter singing. He created major roles for Puccini (Dick Johnson in La fanciulla del West), Mascagni (Cesare in Iris), Giordano (Loris in Fato) and several others.

He had a large repertoire, and spent much of each year at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, where he gave over 600 performances of nearly 40 roles. His training was important. He had some early vocal difficulties and his international career was not a long one: he died of a lung complaint at the age of 48. But the bumbling bronze of his voice and the visceral eloquence of his singing have made him one of that handful of musicians (like Hasfez, Melba, Horovitz and a very few others) who are household names even to those who know little of music.

**Michael Oliver**

**Recommended recording:**

Caruso: The Early Recordings ( Nimbus Prima Voce N 7903)

**6. PLACIDO DOMINGO**

With a virtually boundless repertoire, Domingo is the supreme actor-singer of his generation. And with more than 100 roles committed to disc he is, far and away, the most recorded tenor in history – a remarkable achievement for a singer who began his career as a baritone (a range he still occasionally sings in). A passionate populariser of opera, his马路to-idiol looks

**RUNNERS UP**

Those we left out include Enida Armstrong, Aretha Anger, Melita Battersby, Teresa Berganza, Enna Bresser, Franco Corelli, Amelita Galli Curci, Jan de Gaetani, Nicola Ghezzi, Maria Jeritza, Edith Mathie, Robert Merrill, Martha Niccol, Mario del Monaco, Julius Patzak, Hermann Frey, Schaus Raimy, John Stanley Quirk, Cesare Sera, Eleanor Storier, Matti Talvela, Maggie Teyte, Tatiana Troyanos, Ashraf Vanay, Fats Woller, Felicity Lott, Ann Murray, Philip Langridge, Wynnef Jones, John Tomlinson, Tell us your favourites.

**KATHLEEN FERRIER**

British contralto, 1912-53

Kathleen Ferrier's professional singing career did not start until she was 31, and lasted only 12 years. In 1946, she made her operatic début at Britten's Rape of Lucretia, Gluck's Orfeo quickly followed, and the "What is life?" aria became synonymous with her name -- as did her famous recording of the unaccompanied English folksong, Blow the Wind Southerly. With Bruno Walter's encouragement, she sang Mahler at a time when he was out of fashion, She first sang Das Lied von der Erde (Song of the Earth) at the 1947 Edinburgh Festival with Peter Pears, and with Walter conducting. By the time she reached the final bars of the "Abschied" she was in tears and could not sing the final "weig".

Ferrier's voice is a generous and rich contralto which she uses quite artlessly. It is the honesty and simplicity of her singing which touches the listener. As a lasting moment I would choose the recording of Mahler's Das Lied von der Erde which she made with Julius Patzak and Bruno Walter in Vienna in 1952. The final "Abschied" has a special poignancy. She died from cancer in the following year.

**Terry Williams**

**recommended recording:**

Decca 417 129-2

**Placido Domingo: a fine tenor voice and a versatile actor**
THE GREATEST SINGERS OF THE CENTURY

and natural charisma have earned him legions of adoring fans. But it is the voice that earns their abiding loyalty. A big, powerful, unmitigatedly masculine voice smoothly expressed with near faultless intonation and a rich, intensely lyrically feel for character, its ability to describe tenderness and sensitivity is the real key to his success.

It is in Italian repertory that his lyric-dramatic prowess has been most pronounced with recommendable contributions to Donizetti’s Lucia di Lammermoor, Puccini’s Manon Lescaut (a Des Grieux to die for) and a host of Verdi operas – Ada, Luisa Miller, Nabucco, La Traviata, and a soaring, surely definitive Otello. French opera – Bizet, Massenet, Meyerbeer – has provided memorable performances, too, and after a shaly start, he is proving increasingly more comfortable in Wagner. With category-defying musical sympathies – as wide as the world itself – he recently enjoyed considerable success on disc with a return to the zarzuelas of his native Spain with which he made his professional debut in 1957 (hear his zarzuela disc on Astrea Audios)

Showing few signs of slowing down, he continues to investigate the repertoire with the sincerity, integrity and unequivocal curiosity that has characterised a career now in its fifth decade and made him what he undoubtedly is: the greatest male singer of the century,

Michael Quinn
Recommended Recording: Verdi: Otello (Deutsche Grammophon 438 885-2)

La Divina: as a singing actress Callas Is unbeatable

Maria Callas was born and brought up in New York. She spent the war years in Greece, making her international debut as La Gooconda in Verona in 1947. For the next few years she sang heroic Wagnerian roles, Isolde, Brunnhilde in Die Walküre and Kundry. But in 1949 she also began to sing in bel canto operas by Bellini, Rossini and Donizetti, and it was in them, and in some major Verdi and Puccini roles, as well as in lesser eighteenth and nineteenth century Italian composers that she established herself as the greatest opera singer of the age, and equal in authority and fame to any who has ever lived.

She gave herself to her roles so unsparring, both as singer and actor, that by the end of the 1950s her voice was showing serious signs of wear, though she continued to appear on stage until 1965. She came out of retirement in 1973 for a worldwide concert tour with Giuseppe di Stefano, but her voice had largely gone and she retreated to her Parisian home as a recluse until she died in 1977. Many recordings, both made in the studio and of live performances, show that all the fuss around Callas was completely justified.

She has no peer for intensity, astonishing breath control, overall musicality and fearless giving of herself to her roles. She was at her greatest recreating operas that had been almost or wholly forgotten, and giving them a dramatic dimension which no-one believed they had. But also as Tosca, Madame Butterfly. Ada, perhaps above all in La Traviata, she is the despair of all sopranos who have followed her. Her influence on the way those roles are sung has been enormous, and her reputation rightly goes from strength to strength.

Wretched personal life, which most famously involved her metamorphosis from pachyderm obesity to slender beauty, with a movement into high society and a long and devastating affair with Aristotle Onassis, stoked the flames of a reputation which got out of her control and ruined the already delicate balance of her nerves. It is a tribute to her transcendent greatness: that none of that makes the least difference when one is in the presence of her art. Michael Tanner
Recommended recording: Bellini: Norma (1968) EMI CMS 5 66428-2

TITO GIBBA
Italian baritone, 1913-84
Tito Gobbi was the pre-eminent Italian baritone of the post was era, and a household name even in Britain, both as a Covent Garden regular and through his appearance in The Class Mountain and other films. His vocal talent was recognised whilst he was still a teenager, but his family’s genteel poverty made his studies a struggle, which he alleviated with film acting. After an inauspicious provincial debut he joined the Rome Opera in 1937, under the aegis of Tullio Serafin, graduating to major roles such as Rigoletto and Ford, opposite the great Marnelo Stabile’s Falstaff.
Gobbi’s voice despite its distinctive smoky tone, was not the strongest voice for the repertoire, but he used it with both refined musicality and extraordinary intensity and relish for words and action. He became one of the new generation of singing actors and amongst the greatest, a stocky but personable stage figure, with the ability to generate both charm and menace. In 1941 he sang the title role in the Italian premiere of Weiszstuck, but otherwise held largely to the Italian repertoire.
Throughout the 1950s and 1960s he made a towering international career, especially as a mordant, joyously satirical Scarpa, an ideal foil to Callas’s seethingly intense Tosca, but also in warmer roles – a lively and lovable Falstaff, although something of an Italian dandy instead of a bluff English swaggerer, and a mercenary Figaro. He sang until the mid-1970s and also founded a summer school for younger singers.
Michael Scott Rohan
Recommended recording: Rossini: Barber of Seville (EMI CMS 5 66428-2)

COVER DISC

VERDI Otello – Act 3, “Di! mi potrei scogliar tuttie mal” (4:29) Missed by lago into believing his Desdemona has been unfaithful to him, Otello makes a despairing entreaty to heaven wishing poverty, shame and ruination upon himself rather than be robbed of his beloved. If not, he determines, let her first confess her crime, then die!

BELLINI Norma – Act 1, Scene 1, “Casta Diva”, extract (2:59) Norma is Bellini’s masterpiece and one of the finest of all bel canto operas, the title role is one of the most dramatically demanding in the entire repertory; along with Tosca and Medea it provided Callas with her greatest role. Norma had had an earlier love affair with Pollione, the Roman pro-consul, and borne him children; Pollione, however, is now interested in the young priestess Adalgisa, though he fears Norma’s vengeance. Adalgisa confides in Norma, after the latter has sung this great invocation to the rising moon Casta Diva. Over a simple orchestral line of Mozartian elegance, Callas sings with unequaled intensity and passion.

ROSSINI The Barber of Seville – Act 1, “Largo al factotum” (4:46) Gobbi, brilliantly as he portrayed Rodrigo’s doomed nobility and Scarpia’s sadistic snarl, was equally vivis Roseini’s cheerfully hedonistic Figaro, extrovert barber and matchmaker to all Seville. He introduces himself with “Make way for the busiest man in the town!” (0:40) and sings of the joys of life as a barber “di qualita” (1:05), always busy – especially with extra commissions for ladies (2:23) and gentlemen. Everyone calls on him, for haircuts, shaves, wigs, clandestine letters – “One at a time please”. He’s summoned from every side (3:45), high and low – and without overplaying the funny voices, as so many Figaros do (4:09) “A brave Figaro, brav, bravissimo!”

July 1999 Classic CD 48
KIRSTEN FLAGSTAD
Norwegian dramatic soprano, 1895-1962

Kirsten Flagstad was trained by her aunt, and made her debut in 1913, singing a large repertoire, with many light roles, even in operettes, until the early 1930s. Only in 1932 did she undertake the role of Isolde, which she went on to sing all over the world, totaling 182 performances of it. In 1935, when she made her debut at the Met in New York, as Sieglinde in Die Walküre, she finally created a sensation, and from then on she became identified with the heroic Wagner roles, especially Brunnhilde and Isolde.

She went back to occupied Norway to be with her husband in 1941, and hardly sang again until after the War. She kept her voice in magnificent shape until she retired from the stage in 1951, and afterwards, singing taxing roles until the late 1950s, when she was over 60. Her last roles were Purcell’s Dido in London, performed twice an evening for a quartet of Guinness, and Gluck’s Alciste. She also had a great success in 1940-45 at Salzburg singing Fidelo under Furtwängler.

The beauty of Flagstad’s voice is unmistakable, and remained extraordinarily constant throughout her long career. That was largely thanks to the care with which she sang new parts, so that her major career only got under way when she was 40. She had a placid temperament, and that has often led to criticism of her performances for lack of fire, especially compared with Freda Leider, the great Wagnerian whom she supplanted. The many records she made give a powerful impression of her inexhaustibility and warmth of tone. Without offering detailed new insights into her roles, she did do them the fullest musical justice, and brought to them the most simple voice they have ever been accorded, Singing the notes as beautifully and accurately as possible, she is as moving as need be. The sheer fire of Leider, Mod! and Varnay escaped her, but the goddess-like impression is irrefutable.

Michael Tanner
Recommended recording: Tristan und Isolde/Furtwängler (1952) SMG 925454-2

2

DIETERICH FISCHER-DIESKAU
German baritone, b1925

Fischer-Dieskau began his career in the opera house, but he first made his name outside Germany as an outstandingly gifted, imaginative and intelligent Lieder (German art song) singer. His voice was rich and very beautiful and his immaculate technique made possible an exceptionally long career: he made his début in 1947 and only retired from singing in 1992, when he was 67 (he had retired from the operatic stage 10 years earlier). He rose to fame very rapidly; his first operatic role, at 22 in Berlin, was the major one of Posa in Verdi’s Don Carlos, and by his mid-20s he was singing in opera houses and concert halls throughout Europe. In the 1970s he began a second career as a conductor, which stills continues, and he has written numerous and thoughtful books, mainly on German song, but also on Nietzsche and Wagner.

His repertoire was vast (thousands of songs, hundreds of operatic roles and concert works), and no singer has made more recordings, including nearly all the songs of the major Lieder-composers that are suitable for a male voice, His stage repertoire included many Italian operas as well as German ones, but he was especially admired in Strauss and Wagner. The roles of Mittenhofer in Rameau’s Zoro for Young Lovers and King Lear in Albert Raimann’s opera were written for him, as were the baritone roles in Britten’s War Requiem and Tippott’s The Vision of St Augustine.

He is widely seen as the greatest male Lieder-singer of his period, and many of his qualities that earned him that position he brought also to his operatic roles: an extreme care for the text, a subtle palette of vocal colour, fine control of phrasing and a penetrating intellect. He was criticized for over-emphasising words but the current popularity of the German song repertoire owes more to him than to anyone else, and his influence on three generations of singers has been incalculable.

Michael Oliver
Recommended recording: Schubert: songs with Gerald Moore (SMU CMS7 603559-2)

3

WAGNER Tristan and Isolde Act 1, Scene 3 "Wie lachend sie mir Lieder singen", extract

Kirsten Flagstad excelled in this role of the great lover in Wagner’s recreation of a Celtic myth set off the coast of Cornwall. Listen to her wonderfully rounded and noble tone, warm and beautiful but also strong – and as penetrating as a laser beam. On the ship which is bearing Isolde to her marriage with King Mark, Tristan is in command. Tristan and Isolde are already in love; she does not love Mark, and there is tension as each is aware of the situation. A sailor is heard singing a love song, Isolde plans to poison herself and Tristan, but Brangäne, her attendant puts a love potion in the drinking cup instead of the poison. As the ship nears land, Isolde summons Tristan. They both are thrown into paroxysms of ecstatic love. This is Wagner at his most powerfully emotional and sensual.

SCHUBERT Nacht und träume (3:22)

In this soothing Schubert song which has the effect of time standing still Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau sings with his customary sensitivity to text but also with raptly beautiful tone, a quality which people tend to forget given that so much emphasis is given on the intelligence of his interpretations. Gerald Moore starts the simple accompaniment before the singer comes in with a long held first note “Heil!ge” (holy). It calls for the smoothest legato and great reserves of breath control.

"Holy night, to earth descend; and the dreams float down as well, as your moonlight fills the room, fills the sleeping hearts of men."

"And they listen eagerly; crying, when the day awakes: stay with us, you holy night, soothing dreams, return to us!"
A web page devoted to Jussi Björling proudly proclaims him the greatest tenor of the century, Enrico Caruso, who would easily have stolen this accolade at one time, perhaps seems too remote, his recordings too incomplete to make him vital to so many people’s musical happiness. Björling, in contrast, made numerous records with all the advantages of the electrical process, the mono LP, and in his final years, stereo. Certainly he is the people’s tenor, for the voice recommends itself straightaway no matter how little or how much one has to compare him with. Björling was singularly blessed with a musical family. His father knew a thing or two about singing and the technique that would sustain a voice beyond the forty-fifth year. With his father and two brothers the Swedish family stormed Sweden and America in a group entitled, unremarkably, the Björling Quartet. Together they performed night after night in venues large and small. They were so popular they totaled some 98 concerts in Sweden in 88 different venues. Their success extended to a few little-known recordings. Jussi learnt about life on the road and, crucially for his career in opera, he learnt how to nurture and preserve his voice (he lost little in flexibility and power of tone as he grew older).

It was the great John Forsell, baritone and “dictator” of the Royal Opera in Stockholm, who launched Jussi’s career as he came to the end of his studentship at the Stockholm Conservatoire. On 21 July 1930 he appeared as the timpanist in Manon Lescaut. A month later he sang Don Ottavio in Don Giovanni. His career was set. While he continued to sing regularly in Stockholm, America craved him, as did London. Only Italy turned its back, considering his classical style somewhat unappealing compared with the more expressive manner of Italian tenors. Even before his operatic success erupted with such unstoppable force, the first solo recordings had been made. One operatic item and three songs were recorded in Sweden for the home market in 1929. Björling, a mere shrilling of 18 years, heard his own voice for the first time on discs that still sound astonishing for one so young. In order to hear that voice, Björling took receipt not only of the 78s but also a gramophone, which was given to him in a large parcel. Once home he “spent the afternoon playing them”. He was most struck by the fact he simply couldn’t recognise his own voice.

Less popular with the opera management was Björling’s decision to make some dance records, which enraged Forsell, who made it quite clear that if this was what he really wanted to do he should change his name! Forsell had occasion to deal forcibly with Björling at his debut, when he sang Don Ottavio. Forsell was singing Don Giovanni as Björling faced him on stage holding a sword (he’s supposed to challenge him in the opera). Björling froze, Forsell yelled, “Get going, damn it!”. Forsell picked his sword in the direction of Björling’s stomach; in shock Björling parried his thrust and the Don’s fell flew up and cut his Forsell’s – eyebrow. Nevertheless, the audience was happy with its bright new tenor, as were the critics.

So what is it about the voice that makes Björling, for so many, the tenor? Those who knew Björling commented on his child-like quality, a certain vulnerability that made him very attractive as a person. This vulnerability is heard in the voice. It is not a flaw, but rather a direct appeal to the emotions. As he launches into the great love music in La bohème, Act I, the vocal line is absolutely firm; everything is perfectly under control, and yet somehow the tenor brings us right up against the tender awakening of love as Rodolfo takes Mimì’s hand into his own. Nobody else – certainly not recent tenors – combine gentleness and strength like this. Needless to say, the voice is exceedingly lovely. Of a rich, burnished gold, mellow, and with a very slight huskiness, it is not a sound one can easily tire of. There is little undesirable vibrato, the tuning is usually spot on, there is not a hint of breathiness, top notes ring our loud and true, and he has all the musical virtues one might wish for, including a good sense of rhythm (rare among tenors), and an ability and willingness to sing pianissimo (even rarer among tenors!).

Simon Tразioso
Recommended recording: Jussi Björling Edition (EMI 5 66306 2) 4 discs 2966 08 20