

Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*: A conspectus of the discography
by Ralph Moore

There are over ninety recordings of this favourite verismo opera in the catalogue and the first four were all studio-made. The earliest was an acoustic version made for "La voce del Padrone" (obviously, "His Master's Voice") as long ago as 1920 with the conductor Sabajno, who was also in charge of the premiere in 1896; I have not heard it but cannot imagine it holds more than historical, specialist interest. Next came one made in the electrical era and as such is listenable for the willing and tolerant punter; it is the first of those I review below. An excellent wartime recording on 78's starring Gigli and Caniglia still commands respect. The first LP version was for Cetra in 1953, then Decca released a famous stereo account of their 1956 recording, EMI caught up with a studio recording starring Franco Corelli and Antonietta Stella. Each of "The Three Tenors" made his own recording (Domingo in 1976, Pavarotti in 1982-84, Carreras in 1986) then after a long gap, the most recent studio version was released in 2005. Thus, a total of a dozen studio recordings has been made to-date and most were made a long time ago now. I consider all of those bar that earliest one. There are several notable live recordings in decent sound, and some superbly sung live recordings which are sonically rather less than acceptable; I have included samples of those in my survey of twenty-two recordings in all.

I have tactfully passed over Andrea Bocelli's assumption of the title role, expertly [reviewed](#) by my colleague Göran Forsling but cannot refrain from quoting his assessment of the lead tenor as justification for my omission: "One has the feeling that a size M singer is trying to fill out a size XL T-shirt." So that won't do. Bocelli has no business assuming a role meant for real operatic voices.

The opera itself is by far Giordano's most popular and successful and has maintained its place in the repertoire. It offers three, equally meaty, prominent roles for the principal singers but Giordano's provision of four great arias and two roof-rattling duets with the soprano has proved especially attractive to big-voiced tenors; hence singers such as Del Monaco and Corelli have dominated the catalogue. However, sopranos and baritones, too, have seized upon the histrionic vocal potential of their roles and thus stars such as Tebaldi and Bastianini also feature prominently in the most desirable recordings. The arias "La mamma morta" and "Nemico della Patria" are show-stoppers but the music is inspired throughout, replete not just with set-piece concert arias but also rivetingly dramatic confrontations; there is even a nice cameo aria for a good alto – though not much for a bass. The libretto is taut and psychologically interesting, setting up complex characters in arresting conflicts; it really is a very skilful piece of dramaturgy. In some ways, it resembles *La gioconda* in its gung-ho commitment to the idea of the Big Sing and when it's performed con gusto it's a real crowd-pleaser. The final scene is among the most stirring in opera when delivered by two really big voices.

The recordings

Lorenzo Molajoli – 1929 (studio, mono) Naxos, Arkadia, Myto
Orchestra - Teatro alla Scala
Chorus - Teatro alla Scala

Andrea Chénier - Luigi Marini
Carlo Gérard - Carlo Galeffi
Madeleine di Coigny - Lina Bruna Rasa
La mulatta Bersi - Ida Conti
La Contessa di Coigny - Anna Masetti-Bassi
Madelon - Anna Masetti-Bassi
Roucher - Salvatore Baccaloni
Il sanculotto Mathieu - Aristide Baracchi
Fouquier Tinville - Salvatore Baccaloni
Un Incredible - Giuseppe Nessi

Pietro Fléville - Natale Villa
L'abate - Giuseppe Nessi

I want this recording in my collection as much for its historic significance as its intrinsic merit, but it has both. For me, the ill-fated Lina Bruna-Rasa alone is reason enough to buy this, especially as in this excellent Naxos re-mastering we get seven arias recorded by her in April and May 1928 when she was only twenty but already an extraordinarily mature and exciting singer. She has a terrifically gutsy lower register and a thrilling brilliance of tone which occasionally borders on the hysterical and uncontrolled but is ideal for verismo excesses.

Her presence and discographical importance apart, some might also point to the conducting as worthy of note. I am increasingly less inclined to scoff at the idea that the mysterious "Lorenzo Molajoli" was a pseudonym for Toscanini under contract elsewhere simply because the musical direction is so vital, driven and flexible. The Italian masters mainly used here contain a lot of hiss but otherwise the distortions and blaring - particularly noticeable when Masini is singing - which are the result of miking too close and the rather nasal quality of his tenor, are for the most part nicely tamed by Ward Marston - but don't expect too much from the primitive electric recording.

Neither Galeffi nor Masini is as successful as Bruna-Rasa in their roles. The tenor had a hard, metallic tone, lacking the heft and burnished glow of more celebrated exponents of this most demanding of tenor roles but he is expressive with the text, secure of intonation and sufficiently heroic to carry off the impossibly sustained belting required of him in the last tumbrel scene. Galeffi is ultimately too light of voice to convey the sheer venom and intensity of utterance required for Gérard but he warms up a good deal for his outpouring of love for Maddalena and supplies the kind of focus and neat vocalisation which explain how baritones of his ilk with a tenorial quality such as Battistini, Scotti and De Luca sustained such long careers whereas the heavyweights like Ruffo and Amato experienced vocal crises and faded early. He makes a good, forceful Amonasro to Bruna-Rasa's Aida in the duet amongst the bonus items.

The supporting cast is strong, with five singers doubling up (or even trebling) the smaller roles, including buffo bass Salvatore Baccaloni and the leading comprimario character tenor (before Alessio De Paolis and Piero di Palma) Giuseppe Nessi, who much later sang the Emperor in Callas' *Turandot* recording.

Oliviero De Fabritiis – 1941 (studio, mono) Naxos, Arkadia
Orchestra - Teatro alla Scala
Chorus - Teatro alla Scala

Andrea Chénier - Beniamino Gigli
Carlo Gérard - Gino Bechi
Madeleine di Coigny - Maria Caniglia
La mulatta Bersi - Maria Huder
La Contessa di Coigny - Giulietta Simionato
Madelon - Vittoria Palombini
Roucher - Italo Tajo
Il sanculotto Mathieu - Leone Paci
Fouquier Tinville - Giuseppe Taddei
Un Incredible - Adelio Zagonora
Pietro Fléville - Giuseppe Taddei
L'abate - Adelio Zagonora

While I am not the greatest fan of Gigli - and that's probably enough to annoy some readers straight away - I can understand why he favoured this role; it enables him to employ all the best features of his

voice: the plangent top, the expressive mezza-voce, the liquid tone alternating with stirring, spinto thrust are all here to relish. I still think he lacks the heft and pharyngeal "squillo" of the best exponents of this role, namely Del Monaco (on Decca with the best possible partners in Tebaldi and Bastianini) and, even better, Corelli (accompanied by a wholly committed Stella and under-valued baritone Sereni singing his heart out, on EMI) but there is such a strong sense of ensemble here and the recording is admirable: clean, clear, hardly any congestion in the climaxes.

There is also the advantage of being able to hear two other great artists: Maria Caniglia, Gigli's regular singing partner, better known in recordings made just a little too late in her career but here wonderfully expressive and suffering little from the acidity which afflicted her top notes later on, and Gino Bechi, the huge, black-voiced baritone dubbed by no less than Corelli as "the vocal phenomenon of our age". Comprimario parts are skilfully taken - there is the incidental pleasure of hearing the instantly recognizable timbre of the young Giuseppe Taddei in two roles - and De Fabritiis conducts with his heart on his sleeve - as this great barn-stormer of a score demands.

All of this was achieved in early 1941, as if there were no war going on at the time. This is the paradigm of classic, vintage recordings.

Alberto Paoletti – 1951/2? (studio, mono) Preiser

Orchestra - Teatro dell'Opera di Roma

Chorus - Teatro dell'Opera di Roma

Andrea Chénier - Gino Sarri

Carlo Gérard - Antonio Manca Serra

Madeleine di Coigny - Franca Sacchi

La mulatta Bersi - Loretta di Lelio

La Contessa di Coigny - Anna Marcangeli

Madelon - Lucia Danieli

Roucher - Carlo Platania

Il sanculotto Mathieu - Piero Passarotti

Fouquier Tinville - Alberto Vinci

Un Incredible - Nino Mazziotti

Pietro Fléville - Virgilio Stocco

L'abate - Romeo Legga

Like Cetra, the Italian label Urania – not to be confused with the modern label of the same name – produced a number of safe, solid, mono recordings issued on LP in the early 50's; this one is typical of that output but certainly not as good as the best of Cetra's recordings. Nobody here is a star name and the singing, playing and conducting are at best satisfactory: Serra, the baritone, has a firm voice very much like Rolando Panerai's, but sounds detached and lacking in energy; the role is "phoned in", giving little sense of the passion and conflict residing within the man. The tenor, Gino Sarri, is a decent singer, with a light, tight, fluttery in vocal production but plenty of penetration; he is more than competent. The supporting cast is excellent. However, the soprano, Franca Sacchi, is harsh and shrill-voiced; her screeching in the finale is painful. I recognised her name from my recent survey of La Gioconda and sure enough, she turns up in Gavazzeni's 1957 recording of Ponchielli's masterpiece singing a rather worn La cieca – usually a contralto role but, apparently, following an illness necessitating an enforced break, by 1953 she had made the switch from soprano to mezzo-soprano and on the evidence here that, too, was enforced.

Given the lack of velvet in Sacchi's voice, the dull Gérard and the merely able Chénier, this is no more than an interesting footnote in the discography.

Arturo Basile – 1953 (studio, mono) Warner Fonit, Cetra,
Orchestra - RAI Torino
Chorus - RAI Torino

Andrea Chénier - José Soler
Carlo Gérard - Ugo Savarese
Madeleine di Coigny - Renata Tebaldi
La mulatta Bersi - Ines Marietti
La Contessa di Coigny - Irma Colasanti
Madelon - Irma Colasanti
Roucher - Giuliano Ferrein
Il sanculotto Mathieu - Pier Luigi Latinucci
Fouquier Tinville - Giuliano Ferrein
Un Incredible - Armando Benzi
Pietro Fléville - Alberto Albertini
L'abate - Tommaso Soley

The recording found an honourable place in the discography when it was welcomed as the first LP recording but the only star turn here is the young Renata Tebaldi in a favourite verismo role; indeed, none of the other singers is much remembered today. Savarese has a pleasant, slightly throaty baritone and contributes a rather diffident, lightweight Gérard; he doesn't pack much Angst or menace. Soler has a small, tight tenor, pleasant enough but it sounds as though Nemorino has wandered into the drawing room and he tends to resort to a sob for all-purpose emotional impact. His low notes fade out and he also tends to sing flat. Even Tebaldi sounds a bit prosaic, as if she hadn't yet digested the role – although her soft singing is hauntingly beautiful - and, in truth, the whole thing is undercooked as a performance. Even the acoustic sounds removed, as if there were a slight baffle between us and the performers,

Basile's conducting is fluent and idiomatic but this isn't a front-rank contender when there are so many more desirable options – and we may hear Tebaldi in several later, much more animated recordings.

Fausto Cleva – 1954 (live, mono) Pristine, Myto, Walhall, Arkadia, Andromeda
Orchestra - Metropolitan Opera
Chorus - Metropolitan Opera

Andrea Chénier - Mario Del Monaco
Carlo Gérard - Leonard Warren
Madeleine di Coigny - Zinka Milanov
La mulatta Bersi - Rosalind Elias
La Contessa di Coigny - Hertha Glaz
Madelon - Sandra Warfield
Roucher - Frank Valentino
Il sanculotto Mathieu - Salvatore Baccaloni
Fouquier Tinville - Norman Scott
Un Incredible - Alessio De Paolis
Pietro Fléville - George Cehanovsky
L'abate - Gabor Carelli
Dumas - Osie Hawkins
Schmidt - Lawrence Davidson
Il maestro di casa - Louis Sgarro

Although this performance is available on several labels, by far the best sound is to be on Pristine's XR remastering. It finds Del Monaco in his prime, without the hardness of tone which gradually crept into

his voice and singing softly more often than was later the case but also milking his top notes gloriously. The amplitude of his voice tends to dwarf his co-singers, even Warren. Zinka Milanov, like Tebaldi, kept the role of Maddalena in her repertoire right to the end of her career; she has some difficulty with top notes, swoops a bit and occasionally sounds matronly, but still sings in the grand manner. The final duet is transposed down a tone presumably to accommodate her, which is a pity, but it still makes its mark. Leonard Warren sounds slightly out of sorts in his opening aria but warms up and delivers a powerful, deeply felt "Nemico della Patria".

The supporting cast is strong apart from an embarrassingly clumsy and ill-tuned Mathieu: we hear a husky, characterful Incredibile in Alessio De Paolis, who was a comprimario tenor like his successor Piero De Palma, had over fifty roles under his belt and appeared more than 1500 times at the Met; he is best remembered for his Emperor in the famous recording of Turandot with Nilsson, Björling and Tebaldi. Sandra Warfield gives us a moving Madelon.

Fausto is not the most interventionist or imaginative of conductors – Gavazzeni and Maticic are more released and exciting - but he knows how the music should go. The prompter is too prominent but that's a small irritation. The comparative weakness of Milanov compromises the attraction of this set for me but it is still very enjoyable.

Angelo Questa – 1955 (film-track, mono) Myto, GOP, Cantus

Orchestra - RAI Milano

Chorus - RAI Milano

Andrea Chénier - Mario Del Monaco

Carlo Gérard - Giuseppe Taddei

Madeleine di Coigny - Antonietta Stella

La mulatta Bersi - Luisa Mandelli

La Contessa di Coigny - Maria Amadini

Madelon - Ortensia Beggiano

Roucher - Franco Calabrese

Il sanculotto Mathieu - Leo Puddis

Fouquier Tinville - Leonardo Monreale

Un Incredibile - Athos Cesarini

Pietro Fléville - Arturo La Porta

L'abate - Salvatore De Tommaso

Originally made for film, the soundtrack here on CD is simply appalling - and I speak as a hardened listener to historical recordings. If it had been recorded in 1920 we would find it just about acceptable but this live RAI Milan recording from 1955 is really poor: distant, harsh and constantly marred by a papery background pulse and/or hiss or buzz. It wavers in and out randomly between barely to nearly listenable; for example, the first 2'17" of the introduction is awful then it suddenly becomes better for the rest of that track, through track 2 until track 3, when it suddenly deteriorates again. This happens throughout the whole performance. Fortunately, if you happen to have this recording by accident, the sound is marginally better for the last ten minutes when both Stella - in as good a voice as I have ever heard her, as far as I can tell - and Del Monaco raise the roof.

The sound issue is a pity, because somewhere hidden in the muddy depths is a great performance by a youthful Del Monaco in best, trumpeting voice, Stella in a favourite role and Taddei bringing biting tone and real intensity to his portrayal of Carlo Gérard, the conflicted revolutionary malcontent with a heart and conscience. Like his contemporary Gobbi, Taddei's high notes lack some resonance but he is otherwise ideal. There are some names in the comprimario roles well-known to collectors, such as Maria Amadini, La Cieca in Callas' first recording with Votto of *La gioconda*, bass Franco Calabrese and tenor Athos Cesarini, and also a couple of singers unknown to me but with excellent voices: a rather

shrill but vibrant Bersi from one Luisa Mandelli and a lovely Fléville from Antonio Sacchetti. Ortensia Beggiato makes a fair Vecchia Madelon, despite some tentative top notes.

Conductor Angelo Questa is an old hand: utterly reliable and idiomatic in many recordings for Cetra and if I could hear them at all, I suspect that the orchestra is excellent.

Sadly, despite the quality of the performance, I would avoid it for reason of the poor sound - and of course the same problem applies to the next live recording with Callas and Del Monaco.

Antonino Votto – 1955 (live, mono) EMI, Warner

Orchestra - Teatro alla Scala

Chorus - Teatro alla Scala

Andrea Chénier - Mario Del Monaco

Carlo Gérard - Aldo Protti

Madeleine di Coigny - Maria Callas

La mulatta Bersi - Silvana Zanolli

La Contessa di Coigny - Maria Amadini

Madelon - Lucia Danieli

Roucher - Enrico Campi

Il sanculotto Mathieu - Michele Cazzato

Fouquier Tinville - Vittorio Tatzoli

Un Incredible - Mariano Caruso

Pietro Fléville - Enzo Sordello

L'abate - Mario Carlin

Dumas - Giuseppe Morresi

Schmidt - Eraldo Coda

Il maestro di casa - Carlo Forti

This was always one of the worst live recordings of this opera, technically speaking. Improvements have clearly been effected by the latest remastering, including some reduction in the persistent overloading and resultant shatter, and tape-speed fluctuations have been corrected, but it's still sonically a bit grim. Fortunately, the singing is splendid: Protti opens the opera in strong, vibrant voice, Del Monaco is heroic in a favourite role and Callas deservedly earns tumultuous applause after "La mamma morta" – a miracle of pathos, nuance and dramatic intensity. If only it were easier on the ear.

Gianandrea Gavazzeni – 1956 (studio, stereo) Decca

Orchestra - Santa Cecilia

Chorus - Santa Cecilia

Andrea Chénier - Mario Del Monaco

Carlo Gérard - Ettore Bastianini

Madeleine di Coigny - Renata Tebaldi

La mulatta Bersi - Fiorenza Cossotto

La Contessa di Coigny - Maria Teresa Mandolari

Madelon - Amelia Guidi

Roucher - Silvio Maionica

Il sanculotto Mathieu - Fernando Corena

Fouquier Tinville - Vico Polotto

Un Incredible - Mariano Caruso

Pietro Fléville - Dino Mantovani

L'abate - Angelo Mercuriali

A generation and more of collectors wanting a studio recording have essentially long chosen between this and the 1963 EMI account. Levine's, Chailly's and Patané's studio recordings issued in the 70's and 80's broadened the range on option, yet for many the selection still comes down to either Del Monaco or Corelli rather than one of their three illustrious successors and ultimately that preference depends on personal taste in voices, as both are acknowledged classics. Both have such strong casts in depth, are directed by conductors entirely at home in the verismo idiom and field superlative trios of principal singers in their prime.

Returning to this after listening to so many recordings featuring superb singing but in very indifferent, live, mono sound, confirmed that a first selection must be in a stereo, studio recording such as this – and the vintage Decca sound is extraordinarily good here, its clarity allowing us to hear characterisation details often lost to the microphone in live, mono recordings.

Bastianini doesn't sound a jot less involved or spontaneous for this being made under studio conditions and he is immediately in thrilling, resplendent voice for his opening aria, full of rage and passion. Tebaldi's entrance confirms her also to be in fine form; her singing is both powerful and moving, especially strong in the middle of the voice where Caballé is lacking and her top notes secure. The rest of the cast is first rate, including future star Fiorenza Cossotto as Bersi and Corena's genial Mathieu. Del Monaco's arrival ensures that we are blessed with a celestial cast; he is by no means all bombast as his sterner critics assert and he completes a trio of three of the biggest voices ever to grace a stage. The final duet is as fine as what we hear from Corelli and Stella on the EMI studio recording.

A considerable advantage in this Decca issue is the inclusion of a physical libretto.

Fausto Cleva – 1957 (studio, mono) Walhall, Cantus, Arkadia, Andromeda, Myto
Orchestra - Metropolitan Opera
Chorus - Metropolitan Opera

Andrea Chénier - Richard Tucker
Carlo Gérard - Mario Sereni
Madeleine di Coigny - Maria Curtis Verna
La mulatta Bersi - Rosalind Elias
La Contessa di Coigny - Martha Lipton
Madelon - Belén Amparán
Roucher - Frank Valentino
Il sanculotto Mathieu - Gerhard Pechner
Fouquier Tinville - Norman Scott
Un Incredible - Alessio De Paolis
Pietro Fléville - George Cehanovsky
L'abate - Gabor Carelli

The mono sound here is excellent and the singing first rate: Sereni, in particular, is great; he was always much under-rated but had a lovely, very distinctive voice and invests his characterisation of the tortured Gérard with real intensity and pathos. Curtis Verna is very good - secure, with a strong lower register, but also a tad anonymous and without the creamy fullness of voice of the best exponents of Maddalena. Tucker is in clarion voiced, if rather hard of tone. He has great top notes, which are hit square on with absolutely no sliding. He is never very subtle but always impassioned and heroic, which are the primary qualities for the role of Chénier. As with the 1953 Met recording, the supporting cast is excellent, with De Paolis once again giving us his creepy Incredible. Belén Amparán is a fruity, rich-voiced Madelon.

This is a thoroughly enjoyable, big-scale performance.

Franco Capuana – 1958 (live, mono) Cin, Myto
Orchestra - Teatro di San Carlo di Napoli
Chorus - Teatro di San Carlo di Napoli

Andrea Chénier - Franco Corelli
Carlo Gérard - Ettore Bastianini
Madeleine di Coigny - Antonietta Stella
La mulatta Bersi - Loretta Di Lelio
Madelon - Miriam Pirazzini
Roucher - Antonio Cassinelli
Il sanculotto Mathieu - Vito de Taranto
Fouquier Tinville - Giovanni Amodeo
Un Incredible - Antonio Pirino
Pietro Fléville - Augusto Frati
L'abate - Renato Ercolani
Dumas - Antonio Orlando
Schmidt - Mario Bianchi
Il maestro di casa - Silvio Santarelli

On clear, if rather hissy, mono tape, this radio broadcast preserves a wonderful, live, all-Italian performance from Naples, starring three of the greatest singers ever to undertake the lead roles. The supporting cast is impressive, too; Bersi is sung by Loretta di Lelio, who had recorded the same role back in 1951 for Universal, had recently become Mrs Corelli and was soon to give up her career to support her husband. Bastianini is in splendid voice, richer and darker of timbre than Warren or Sereni, though not, perhaps, acute with the text. Corelli still has a trace of the bleat in his vibrato which earned him some criticism and had been eliminated by the time he came to make his seminal recording for EMI with Stella five years later but the virility of his attack is thrilling. Maddalena was one of Stella's best roles and her pairing with Corelli brings out the best in her strong, smoky soprano. She is very expressive and can hold her own against Corelli's gleaming tenor, as the studio recording demonstrates even more convincingly. Their Act 2 love duet is operatic heaven and the audience demonstrates its appreciation very audibly. The vocal riches of this performance continue with Bastianini's inky-black ruminations opening Act 3 and a showpiece "Nemico della Patria". Stalwart mezzo-soprano Miriam Pirazzini gives us a firm, deeply moving Madelon.

Despite the quality of both the singing and conducting here, given the merely average mono sound, unless you want this particular combination of principal singers in one recording, there is no particular reason to opt for this recording as we can hear them all in other stereo, studio versions – but admittedly not together, as per here.

Lovro von Matacic – 1960 (live, mono) Orfeo d'Or, Golden Melodram, Opera d'Oro, Cetra, GOP
Orchestra - Wiener Staatsoper
Chorus - Wiener Staatsoper

Andrea Chénier - Franco Corelli
Carlo Gérard - Ettore Bastianini
Madeleine di Coigny - Renata Tebaldi
La mulatta Bersi - Margarethe Sjöstedt
La Contessa di Coigny - Elisabeth Höngen
Madelon - Hilde Konetzni
Roucher - Edmund Hurshell
Il sanculotto Mathieu - Alois Pernerstorfer
Fouquier Tinville - Ludwig Welter
Un Incredible - Renato Ercolani

Pietro Fléville - Kostas Paskalis
L'abate - Fritz Sperlbauer
Dumas - Franz Bierbach
Schmidt - Endré Koréh
Il maestro di casa - Harald Pröglhoff

This recording has been issued on several different labels and the slightly murky sound is apparently pretty uniform across the range of them with the advantage, as usual, going to the Orfeo issue; otherwise, I'd just look for the cheapest offer, as it will always be decent mono, even though the strings sound wiry and everything is a bit reverberant and distant.

Of course, it cannot take precedence over the best studio recordings headed, for me, by the one on EMI conducted by Santini and starring Corelli, Stella and Sereni, followed by Gavazzeni with Del Monaco, Tebaldi and Bastianini, but the advantage of this live Vienna recording is that you combine those two earlier casts to produce what looks like an ideal team for this work - not that Del Monaco was much of a step down from Corelli, but the latter had a special aptitude for the eponymous title role. Proceedings are further enhanced by the extra flair and energy of von Maticic's conducting, who did some great things in Wagner, Bruckner and opera in general.

Bastianini is in good form, if at first rather inclined to shout; "Nemico della patria" displays his jet-black baritone at its incisive, impassioned best but also some effective softer singing. Tebaldi is in her element in a role which always suited her gifts and there's not yet too much of the acid in her tone which later crept in. Corelli is in clarion voice, firm with no bleat, and sends the audience wild; applause after his showpiece arias is prolonged, but for me the most beautiful and moving singing comes from him and Tebaldi in their prolonged duet concluding Act 2. She is in gorgeous, rich, floating voice and of course has the heft to match her beefy tenor partner; the final note of "Fino alla morte insiem" on a sustained B flat is orgasmic. "La mamma morta" is full of pathos and despair, some of the best vocal acting I have ever heard from Tebaldi, who could on occasion be generalised in expression. She is aided by the surge of von Maticic's accompaniment. But of course, it is that last duet which has to hit the spot; Tebaldi and Corelli really deliver, at first ardent in their declarations of love, then simply thrilling as they hurl defiance at death and injustice.

There are some familiar names here; the cast is a mixture of Vienna stalwarts and one or two like Paskalis who went on to sing larger solo roles and the Bersi - unknown to me - is very fine. It's surprise to see the great Wagnerian dramatic soprano Hilde Konetzni singing La vecchia Madelon, although she sang smaller supporting roles into the 70's. The chorus is a bit wobbly and the orchestra doesn't always sound that secure given that it's the VPO - maybe they that weren't that acquainted with the music.

This cannot reasonably displace the best studio recordings, but if you are already familiar with the opera, you will enjoy this as a supplement and a souvenir of a great night at the Viennese opera.

Franco Capuana – 1961 (live, mono) Opera d'Oro, GOP

Orchestra - NHK Symphony Orchestra

Chorus - NHK Italian Opera Chorus - Fujiwara Opera Chorus - Tokyo Choraliers

Andrea Chénier - Mario Del Monaco
Carlo Gérard - Aldo Protti
Madeleine di Coigny - Renata Tebaldi
La mulatta Bersi - Anna Di Stasio
La Contessa di Coigny - Amalia Pini
Madelon - Amalia Pini
Roucher - Silvano Pagliuca
Il sanculotto Mathieu - Arturo La Porta

Fouquier Tinville - Giorgio Onesti
Un Incredible - Renato Cesari
Pietro Fléville - Arturo La Porta
Dumas - Silvano Pagliuca
Schmidt - Giorgio Onesti
Il maestro di casa - Silvano Pagliuca

There is no point in pretending that the sound here is any better than you might expect from a live, staged performance recorded in Tokyo nearly sixty years ago, but it is distortion-free and as a bonus you may view video clips of the gloriously extravagant and bejewelled stage production on YouTube recorded by Japanese Television (NHK). It stars two of the greatest exponents of their roles on tour accompanied by a strong, all-Italian supporting cast, some of whom double up roles; Silvano Pagliuca even sings three. The prompter plays quite a prominent part, too. Intonation in the orchestra can be hit and miss and at times distinctly off but they are certainly enthusiastic and Capuana clearly does his best with them.

I wouldn't say Del Monaco is always in very best voice – his tone sometimes turns hard and he is occasionally unsteady; there is also occasionally some intermittent harshness in Tebaldi's soprano, too, but they really inhabit their roles, their sheer volume is always impressive and they give it all they've got. The big moments really wow their audience; the immense joint B flat on the "insieme" concluding their Act 2 love duet receives a prolonged ovation.

I find that Aldo Protti is invariably better than he is given credit for, and he sings firmly and securely here, if a little stolidly and without the glamour of Bastianini or Sereni. However, he has a large voice, one to match his co-stars' and delivers a strong, virile performance.

You may of course hear the same pair in their studio recording with a superior Gérard to Protti in Bastianini, so there is no special requirement to acquire this one, unless you'd like to hear Del Monaco take advantage of the licence granted by performing live and prolong his top notes for maximum grandstanding effect, as per the outrageously held B flat on "t'amo" in his "Improviso". I rather enjoy it.

Gabriele Santini – 1963 (studio, stereo) EMI, Warner
Orchestra - Teatro dell'Opera di Roma
Chorus - Teatro dell'Opera de Roma

Andrea Chénier - Franco Corelli
Carlo Gérard - Mario Sereni
Madeleine di Coigny - Antonietta Stella
La mulatta Bersi - Stefania Malagù
La Contessa di Coigny - Luciana Moneta
Madelon - Anna Di Stasio
Roucher - Giuseppe Modesti
Il sanculotto Mathieu - Paolo Montarsolo
Fouquier Tinville - Giuseppe Modesti
Un Incredible - Piero De Palma
Pietro Fléville - Dino Mantovani
L'abate - Piero De Palma

Alongside Levine's *Adriana Lecouvreur* this is probably my favourite verismo opera recording, a 100% Italian beltfest performed by voices of a species now extinct. It is already fifty-five years old but in superb sound and impressively conducted by Santini who lives and breathes the idiom. There are other

estimable and very recommendable recordings which I wouldn't be without, but this one remains my first choice for its sheer bravado in combination with stereo, studio sound.

Stella was always over-shadowed by Tebaldi and Callas and in truth she wasn't as complete an artist, but here she gives her all, stretching her smoky, grainy soprano to its limits without coming a cropper and keeping up with her machismo tenor, Corelli, in top gear and abandoning all restraint. Their experience together singing this opera live on stage really shows; they are splendidly in sync. Mario Sereni did not have the most refulgent of baritones but this was his finest hour: he sings smoothly with great expression and involvement, always with an Italianate care for the line and exploiting his ability to sustain a legato while always suggesting Gerard's internal conflict. The supporting cast is typically competent for Rome in that era, headed by Piero de Palma doubling up as an oily, insinuating L'Incredibile and an effete, toadying Abbate.

The last ten minutes represent for me what no-holds-barred singing is all about: two great voices at full stretch wringing every ounce of passion and excitement from the super-heated score. Don't try it if you like Bostridge-Padmore-Prégardien-style tenors and your favourite soprano is Sandrine Piau.

The older issues include a booklet libretto; the newer Warner one has a CD ROM; the intermediate EMI Classics has neither, just a synopsis.

Anton Guadagno – 1966 (live, mono) GOP

Orchestra - Philadelphia Grand Opera

Chorus - Philadelphia Grand Opera

Andrea Chénier - Franco Corelli

Carlo Gérard - Dino Dondi

Madeleine di Coigny - Montserrat Caballé

La mulatta Bersi - Rita De Carlo

La Contessa di Coigny - Laurel Miller

Madelon - Sarita Felter

Roucher - Norman Riggins

Il sanculotto Mathieu - Eugene Green

Fouquier Tinville - Herman Salerno

Un Incredible - Herbert Krauss

Pietro Fléville - Joseph Fair

L'abate - Glen Ellsworth

Yet another excellent performance starring Corelli but handicapped by muffled, mono, live sound, whereby the singers often sound far too distanced - even Corelli, who sings wonderfully, sounds removed. My guess is that the tape machine was in the audience as their hysterical approbation is clearer than what's happening on stage. The weakness of Dino Dondi's Gérard, too, compared with the likes of Bastianini, Sereni and Warren is immediately apparent; he's by no means bad but hampered by a lack of the black intensity which marks their characterisation and sings decently without suggesting the fanatical side of the revolutionary. Nor am I ever convinced that the young Caballé is ideal for the role of Maddalena; she simply isn't an ideal verismo soprano, lacking the necessary lower register heft, being uncomfortable in the middle region of her voice where so much of the role lies and tending to use too many glottal emphases. Guadagno doesn't help; his accompaniment to "La mamma morta" is leaden. Given that we can hear Corelli sing to a similar elevated standard elsewhere in decent sound and find him accompanied by superior co-singers.

Anton Guadagno – 1970 (live, mono) Myto

Orchestra - New Philharmonia Orchestra

Chorus - Ambrosian Opera Chorus

Andrea Chénier - Carlo Bergonzi
Carlo Gérard - Sherrill Milnes
Madeleine di Coigny - Ángeles Gulin
La mulatta Bersi - Emily Derr
La Contessa di Coigny - Carol Kirkpatrick
Madelon - Georgetta Psaros
Roucher - Steven Kimbrough
Il san culotto Mathieu - Christian Du Plessis
Fouquier Tinville - Steven Kimbrough
Un Incredible - Natale De Lazzari
Pietro Fléville - Steven Kimbrough
L'abate - Athole Still
Dumas - Richard Clark
Schmidt - Athole Still

Sharp, well-focused mono sound with a fair amount of hiss makes for bearable listening and it's interesting to hear the two principals, especially as Bergonzi never recorded Chénier, his lirico-spinto tenor perhaps lying on the light side for the role – but what a sensitive, aristocratic job he makes of the characterisation here; he gives a master-class in inflection of text and grading of dynamics his first aria and rightly drives the audience wild. Ángeles Gulin has a very large and attractive voice; I know her only from her live recordings as she appears to have been ignored by the studios despite her success in early Verdi roles but her ample, vibrant and flexible soprano is in many ways ideally suited the role of Maddelena. She and Bergonzi work beautifully together under Guadagno's experienced baton. As a bonus, we hear the young Sherrill Milnes in a role tailor-made for his noble, capacious baritone, complete with the right snarl when necessary.

I love this recording, so it is a shame that the Myto recording is hard to find affordably unless you order from an American website like "House of Opera", where the discs are cheap but shipping charges hefty. However, excerpts from it are included as a bonus on the Gala issue of the 1979 Bartoletti.

James Levine – 1976 (studio, stereo) RCA
Orchestra - National Philharmonic Orchestra
Chorus - John Alldis Choir

Andrea Chénier - Plácido Domingo
Carlo Gérard - Sherrill Milnes
Madeleine di Coigny - Renata Scotto
La mulatta Bersi - Maria Ewing
La Contessa di Coigny - Jean Kraft
Madelon - Gwendolyn Killebrew
Roucher - Allan Monk
Il san culotto Mathieu - Enzo Dara
Fouquier Tinville - Stuart Harling
Un Incredible - Michel Sénéchal
Pietro Fléville - Terence Sharpe
L'abate - Piero De Palma
Dumas - Malcolm King
Schmidt - Isser Bushkin
Il maestro di casa - Nigel Beavan

After years of delay, I finally bought this 1978 recording in the hope and expectation of its being as good as the *Adriana Lecouvreur* from the previous year with the same conductor and three principal

singers. I truly believe that recording to be one of the finest in my (shamefully extensive) collection. This one is undoubtedly very fine but not quite as overwhelming as that *Adriana*, mainly because it demands just that bit more of vocal heft, bravura and stamina from both the tenor and the soprano - and Scotto's voice had already begun to deteriorate a year further on, while Domingo's lovely voice is pushed beyond its comfort zone. Milnes is his usual resonant, dependable self with splendid top notes and pellucid diction.

The greatest strength remains Levine's impassioned conducting; you can hear him grunting and driving on his orchestra who respond enthusiastically to his direction in an opera which hardly demands subtlety to make its mark. I have no truck with the old cliché that this is second-rate verismo claptrap; it's bursting with great tunes and isn't burdened with a poor libretto - no wonder that the three main roles remain so attractive to singer-actors with beefy voices. But in the context of its recorded history, this version of *Andrea Chénier* pales alongside those featuring Gigli, Del Monaco and, above all, Corelli as the noble eponymous hero, just as Scotto's spreading tone, which becomes little more than a scream at climactic points in the last belter of a duet, means that she cannot compare with vocally better endowed Maddalenas such as Caniglia, Bruna-Rasa or Tebaldi. Domingo was never a heroic spinto tenor in the mode required here; his straining and discomfort, accompanied by thinness of tone on the highest, loudest, sustained notes are evident. It is still a very fine performance but not as thrilling as the very best.

Bruno Bartoletti – 1979 (live, mono) Gala

Orchestra - Chicago Lyric Opera

Chorus - Chicago Lyric Opera

Andrea Chénier - Plácido Domingo

Carlo Gérard - Renato Bruson

Madeleine di Coigny - Éva Marton

La mulatta Bersi - Kathleen Kuhlmann

La Contessa di Coigny - Sharon Graham

Madelon - Dinde Curry

Roucher - Alan Opie

Il sanculotto Mathieu - Arnold Voketatis

Fouquier Tinville - Daniel McConnell

Un Incredible - David Gordon

Pietro Fléville - Tom Fox

L'abate - James Schwisow

This is poorly and distantly recorded for its date, the microphone being placed too far from the stage, permitting an echoing effect in the acoustic; it is no more or less listenable than many a live mono recording from the 60's and 70's but I am surprised to find it be mono as late as 1979. Bruson dominates his music as a satisfactory Gérard must and displays little of the bleat and beat which crept into his baritone as the years – although I find his set-piece arias a bit laboured and he does not thrill me as Bastianini or Zancanaro do. Marton deploys her big soprano attractively in a role which suited her vocal lay-out admirably, applying portamento very effectively, even if occasionally some flap obtrudes in her loud, high notes. Domingo is in youthful, vibrant voice, giving what is probably his best performance of Chénier on record, his phrasing nuanced and his top ringing out in especially free and resonant manner – the top B flats in “T’amo” in his first aria and “Credo in una possanza arcana” are thrilling – and the final duet is really stirring, but the reverberant sound prevents us from appreciating it fully. It is a bonus to have the powerful-voiced Kathleen Kuhlmann as Bersi and a neat-voiced Alan Opie as Roucher. I know nothing of the alto who sings Madelon but she is pleasing: firm and moving.

Given the undoubted merits of this live performance, it's regrettable that the indifferent sound disqualifies it from being a prime recommendation.

Riccardo Chailly - 1982/1984 (studio, digital) Decca
Orchestra - National Philharmonic Orchestra
Chorus - Welsh National Opera

Andrea Chénier - Luciano Pavarotti
Carlo Gérard - Leo Nucci
Madeleine di Coigny - Montserrat Caballé
La mulatta Bersi - Kathleen Kuhlmann
La Contessa di Coigny - Astrid Varnay
Madelon - Christa Ludwig
Roucher - Tom Krause
Il sanculotto Mathieu - Giorgio Tadeo
Fouquier Tinville - Neil Howlett
Un Incredible - Piero De Palma
Pietro Fléville - Hugues Cuénod
L'abate - Florindo Andreolli
Dumas - Ralph Hamer
Schmidt - Giuseppe Morresi
Il maestro di casa - Neil Howlett

This was clearly a prestige project from Decca, with the usual hallmarks of quality in the casting, packaging and presentation. Sadly, the principal roles here were surely not ideally suited to either Caballé or Pavarotti; her, in particular, I find simply miscast; she sounds prim and fussy in such a gutsy verismo role; the glottal catch and in the middle of her voice sounds matronly. In “La mamma morta” to me she sounds like the mamma, not the daughter – and she overdoes the portamenti, the “floaty notes” and the Schmaltz in general. Of course, she also does much which is beautiful, especially when singing softly, but the bulk of the role does not lie within the sweet spots of her voice and stretches her, so she over-compensates. She really cannot cut it in the final duet, where her harsh middle voice is a disappointment and she screeches. Pavarotti is much better, as his lighter timbre suggest boyish enthusiasm and naivety – but Chénier was also a soldier as well as a poet; he’s not Rodolfo. Nonetheless, he sings beautifully, with his usual sweetness, strength and subtlety, making much of his arias. He is a bit coarse in the “Improvviso” but at his lyrical best in the lovely “Come un bel di di maggio”.

Nucci as Gérard is caught here still in good voice, before its rapid deterioration and descent into habitual scooping and wobbling, but the beat is just beginning to appear and he’s no match for the best.

As much as I love Varnay in her prime, I cannot hear that it was a good idea to cast her as the Countess in her mid-sixties, after a long career of singing the most demanding hochdramatischen soprano roles in Wagner and Strauss, she is horribly squawky. The rest of the supporting cast has strength in depth: Christa Ludwig here in her mid-fifties is ideal as La vecchia Madelon. Kathleen Kuhlmann repeats her strong Bersi, Piero Da Palma delivers the oily Incredible we would expect of this consummate character-tenor, Tom Krause is a firm, genial Roucher, Giorgio Tadeo a rich Matteo.

The orchestral playing and chorus are flawless; Chailly is much more animated and flexible than I have heard him elsewhere; he creates a suitably febrile excitement then relaxes into the lyrical passages employing generous pauses and rubato without dragging.

The digital sound is excellent although I find some of the spacing excessive; Nucci first sounds as if he is singing from the wings. This recording doesn’t appear to have been re-issued or remastered since it

came out well over thirty years ago in a de luxe box with a well-packed, quadrilingual booklet with a full libretto, notes and illustrations – but it doesn't need it.

Whether you want this will largely depend upon your response to the three leads, especially Caballé and Nucci; for me, there are singers better suited to those roles.

Julius Rudel – 1985 (live, stereo) Disky

Orchestra - Covent Garden

Chorus - Covent Garden

Andrea Chénier - Plácido Domingo

Carlo Gérard - Giorgio Zancanaro

Madeleine di Coigny - Anna Tomowa-Sintow

La mulatta Bersi - Cynthia Buchan

La Contessa di Coigny - Patricia Johnson

Madelon - Anny Schlemm

Roucher - Jonathan Summers

Il sanculotto Mathieu - Rodney Macann

Fouquier Tinville - John Gibbs

Un Incredible - John Dobson

Pietro Fléville - Gordon Sandison

L'abate - Alexander Oliver

Dumas - Roderick Earle

Schmidt - Eric Garrett

I was delighted to discover this recording - especially as Disky do their best to disguise it (see the concluding paragraph below) - mainly because I snap up anything with Giorgio Zancanaro and the prospect of Domingo in his prime looked alluring. Furthermore, Tomowa-Sintow is in best voice: silvery, flickering and very expressive with the text. Cynthia Buchan is very spirited, positive and full-voiced as Bersi and Jonathan Summers is an elegant Roucher. It has to be said, however, that the supporting cast, drawn from Covent Garden regulars, is not of the best, featuring several tired-sounding and some superannuated wobblers. Anny Schlemm is awful as Madelon but certainly sounds old (even though she was only 56 at the time).

Domingo is in good voice, if not as viscerally thrilling as his best predecessors, with the same strengths and some of the limitations as in his studio recording for Levine but I think better here live. Tomowa-Sintow is passionate and vibrant – much better, I confess, than I had anticipated - and both the Act 2 love duet with Domingo and the rousing conclusion find them in peak form. Rudel's conducting here is lyrical and unhurried when needs be; he is a singer's conductor who knows how and when to give them time and elsewhere he is suitably energised. She makes a fine job of "La mamma morta", exploiting the natural richness and vibrancy of her tone to suggest deep emotion.

Zancanaro almost steals the show, with his incisive, resonant tone, crystalline diction and unflinching legato. He is able to encompass both the rage and latent nobility in this revolutionary with a conscience. "Nemico della Patria" brings the house down.

The sound is very good, apart from slight background hiss and a few tape slips and slurs, as per in the orchestral introduction to Gérard's opening aria. Applause is discreetly edited.

A peculiarity of this Disky issue is that it helpfully includes a brief biography of the composer and track listings with a plot synopsis, but fails to provide any recording date or a cast list beyond identifying the conductor and Domingo, and then misattributes the venue and orchestra as La Scala but this is presumably the same soundtrack as in the video release of the Covent Garden production.

Giuseppe Patanè – 1986 (studio, digital) CBS
Orchestra - Hungarian State Orchestra
Chorus - Hungarian Radio & TV Chorus

Andrea Chénier - José Carreras
Carlo Gérard - Giorgio Zancanaro
Madeleine di Coigny - Éva Marton
La mulatta Bersi - Klára Takács
La Contessa di Coigny - Tamara Takács
Madelon - Éva Farkas
Roucher - Franco Federici
Fouquier Tinville - Tamás Bátor
Un Incredible - Tullio Panè
Pietro Fléville - Gábor Vághelyi
L'abate - István Rozsos
Dumas - Kázmér Sárkány
Schmidt - János Tóth
Il maestro di casa - Józef Moldvay

I first approached this recording with some reservations. First, I was unsure whether Carreras would still be in good vocal condition; although he was only forty when this was made, it was just before his leukaemia was diagnosed and when he was already approaching the end of his glory years, that first decade of his international career. Secondly, there are so many great accounts of this blockbuster of an opera, that another would have to be rather special to compete; my own favourites include studio recordings starring as Chénier tenors Gigli, Del Monaco, Corelli, Domingo and Marini. the latter going all the way back to a recording made in 1931, conducted by Molajoli with Bruna Rasa. Finally, Eva Marton 's huge foghorn of a soprano can be a barrier to the enjoyment of some; she could be an unremitting belter yet has also done some fine things, including a good Elektra, Judith in *Bluebeard* and, surprisingly, Margherita in Boito's *Mefistofele*.

On the assured credit side, some great things have come from the Hungaroton label and I have always liked the conducting of Patanè; furthermore, I am a huge fan of the great Giorgio Zancanaro, whom I consider to be the most under-rated of more recent baritones, so this looked as if it was worth a try.

I was not disappointed - in fact, pleasantly surprised. Zancanaro is, as I had hoped, absolutely riveting in his big arias, especially "Nemico della patria", his voice even, smooth, powerful and expressive; I love the fast pulse and steel in his sound. Patanè brings unhurried weight and distinction to his conducting, really bringing out the beauty and detail of Giordano's orchestration and the orchestra itself plays magnificently. The chorus, too, is excellent; I love the distancing it is given in the ironically idealised and peaceful pastoral interlude in Act 1. The supporting cast ranges between barely adequate - a gusty Madelon where sometimes her one aria can be a show-stealer - and very good, as in Franco Federici's Roucher. The two Hungarian mezzos both named Takacs are a bit wobbly, but Klara is less offensive in that regard than Tamara, even if she lacks penetration up top.

But how about our hero and heroine? Marton is as expected only steadier: big and brazen but expressive, too, if only in a generalised way. Her tone is always slightly harsh - but Tebaldi evinced the same quality as she matured and continued to sing this, a favourite role - and she hasn't the range of vocal colour to provide much nuance in her arias and duets. However, she makes a real impact in "La mamma morta" with her evident commitment and the sheer size of voice; indeed, she is in danger of dwarfing Carreras in the belting duet concluding the aria with its huge, sustained top Bs - which she nails and he just about manages, although under audible strain.

Otherwise Carreras is in good voice with only a marginal loosening of the pulse of his vibrato in evidence, and sometimes an element of windiness mitigates the resonance of his timbre. He sings his big numbers with huge intensity and emotion, and by and large he is still a beautiful tenor. He cannot provide the visceral thrill of Del Monaco or Corelli but nobody would reasonably expect him to; certainly, he nearly matches Domingo in his recording for Levine.

The recorded sound is first rate and the presentation of the original CD issue lavish, with an informative essay, a full libretto and an oversized carton to contain the booklet and CD case.

Marcello Viotti – 1989 (live composite, digital) Capriccio

Orchestra - Radio-Sinfonie-Orchester Frankfurt

Chorus - Hungarian Radio & Television Chorus

Andrea Chénier - Franco Bonisolli

Carlo Gérard - Renato Bruson

Madeleine di Coigny - Maria Guleghina

La mulatta Bersi - Gisella Pasino

La Contessa di Coigny - Evghenia Dunekova

Madelon - Glenys Linos

Roucher - Michele Pertusi

Il sanculotto Mathieu - Stefano Rinaldi-Miliani

Fouquier Tinville - Claudio Otelli

Un Incredible - Heinz Zednik

Pietro Fléville - Hans Helm

L'abate - Pierre Lefèvre

This recording is designated as a "Live Composite" in the CLOR opera discography and a previous reviewer is sure that this is a radio broadcast before a very quiet audience. However, there is not a trace of extraneous noise and I note that the recording took place over several days, between 30 August and 2 September 1989, so according to my ears this must be a studio recording unless there was more than one radio broadcast performance. Either way, the sound is very good, although everything is just a little bit distanced in the audio perspective. The Hungarian choir and Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra are first rate under Viotti's, fleet, sensitive direction, even if occasionally I could wish with just a bit more of the gung-ho, Italianate approach to verismo brought to their studio recordings by Levine, Santini, Gavazzeni and Patané.

It is precisely with Renato Bruson's Gérard that I have reservations in this recording; I have never warmed to what I hear as an incipient bleat in his vocal production and rather weak top and bottom notes, without the black, metallic gleam I hear in baritones like Milnes and Bastianini, who previously excelled in that role. He is certainly better here than I have heard him elsewhere, so if you get on with his sound, you'll have no objection, as he acts very well and is clearly inside the part. The rest of the supporting cast is very good, including a splendid Bersi from Gisella Pasino, a rich-voiced Contessa di Coigny from Evghenia Dunekova and a similarly impressive Vecchia Madelon from Glenys Linos - three singers of whom I have never heard but who are all clearly major singers.

The opera itself is an uninterrupted melodic delight, bursting with great arias and dramatic confrontations; it has been a favourite with big-voiced tenors and sopranos since its premiere in its 1896 and I cannot understand why it does not hold a more prominent place in the operatic canon, especially as none other of Giordano's nine operas - with the possible exception of *Fedora* - has approached the success of this one. Gigli and Caniglia, Del Monaco and Tebaldi, Corelli and Stella and Domingo and Scotto have all made superb recordings; so how do Franco Bonisolli and Maria Guleghina (here spelt "Gulegina", Polish-style for some reason - she is Armenian-Ukrainian) measure up in such exalted company?

Guleghin's big, vibrant, slightly fluttery soprano is well-suited to the role of Maddalena; her fast vibrato adds tension and intensity to her singing and she rises to the grand moments. Bonisolli is oddly restrained in his first aria, but his baritonal heft and security up top, in combination with precisely inflected, native Italian diction make him a grand, sympathetic and involving Chénier. Despite his increasing shenanigans as he aged, including the famous incident where he was fired from Salzburg for chucking his sword at Karajan in the pit, he was no brainless belter. Yes; he could deploy the can belto tricks and hold a top C or D indefinitely to the fury of conductors, but he was a highly subtle and versatile artist who could sing a very wide range of roles from bel canto lyric to dramatic tenor roles and, as here, could show remarkable restraint. He keeps his powder dry in that first aria before rising to a rousing conclusion with the thrilling "Amor, divino dono, non lo schernir" and the duet which closes Act 2 is thrilling. He occasionally slides up to top notes but the security once he's there is very satisfying and there is never any sense of strain in his big, generous tenor.

Of course, the make or break is that final, climactic screamer of a duet, "Vicino a te" as the tumbrils wheel the lovers off to be decapitated. Barely five minutes of the kind of vocal lunacy only true opera aficionados respond to, and Bonisolli and Guleghina deliver, even if no-one will replace my favourite duo of Corelli and Stella. If only they had had Zancanaro as their baritone partner...

(I have the bargain "edition opera" issue with the pink and orange cube front cover; apparently the original one on Capriccio had a full libretto.)

Vlekoslav Sutej – 2005 (studio, digital) Universal
Orchestra - Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano «Giuseppe Verdi»
Chorus - Coro Sinfonico di Milano «Giuseppe Verdi»

Andrea Chénier - Fabio Armiliato
Carlo Gérard - Carlo Guelfi
Madeleine di Coigny - Daniela Dessi
La mulatta Bersi - Rossana Rinaldi
La Contessa di Coigny - Viorica Cortez
Madelon - Viorica Cortez
Roucher - Enzo Capuano
Il sanculotto Mathieu - Marco Camastra
Fouquier Tinville - Antonio Marani
Un Incredible - Mauro Buffoli
Pietro Fléville - Antonio Marani
L'abate - Mauro Buffoli
Dumas - Andrea Snarski
Schmidt - Andrea Snarski
Il maestro di casa - Andrea Snarski

I felt obliged to review this simply because it was the last studio recording to-date and has since received little attention.

It is at first a pleasure to listen to such a clean, clear, refined digital recording – then the first voice in the person of the major-domo instantly disappoints and we sigh. The Gérard, Carlo Guelfi, is competent with good diction, but there isn't much gleam or resonance in his cloudy baritone and voice after voice then enters without impressing; Viorica Cortez was a fine mezzo in her day but here at nearly seventy sounds very worn and although that suits her portrayal of La vecchia Madelon, it doesn't afford the listener much pleasure. There is more than a hint of rasp and flap in Daniela Dessi's soprano by this stage of her career, although she was only in her late forties. She sings with sincerity and gives an "old-fashioned", grandstanding performance of "La mamma morta" but there isn't much variety in

her slightly scratchy tone. The best singer here purely in terms of vocal production is the Bersi but she is not exceptional. None of the comprimario singers – who sing two or three roles each - is much to write home about, especially compared with their predecessors in older recordings. Which leaves Fabio Armiliato to raise the game: sadly, his husky, lachrymose bleating conveys nothing of the alluring Romantic hero Chénier is meant to be. He often sounds as if he is about to run out of both breath and tone and frequently completes phrases by dint of sheer willpower; top notes are disfigured by a pronounced beat. I suppose he's acceptable enough as an all-purpose, second-rate Italian tenor but five minutes of listening to Gigli, Del Monaco or Corelli will dispel any illusion of his adequacy.

The conducting is slack and uninspired; the crowd scenes are dull. This can in no manner rival the best; pass over it.

Recommendations

In some ways I found coming to a conclusion for a final recommendation quite easy because despite discovering many fine alternatives along the way, ultimately nothing changed: for me the finest version remains the 1963 EMI recording with Corelli and Stella, yet there were so many pleasant surprises that I feel obliged to indicate where others might veer towards them if they don't especially care for those artists or, like me, like to have supplementary versions on their shelves. (Second choices in brackets.)

Studio mono: De Fabritiis 1941

Live mono: Lovro von Matačić 1960 (Capuana 1958)

Studio stereo: Santini 1963* (Gavazzeni 1956)

Live stereo: Rudel 1985 (Viotti 1989)

Studio digital: Patané 1986

*top recommendation.