

The Gramophone & Typewriter Company (G&T, 1902)

The first Caruso recordings were made on April 11, 1902. This session has been described in countless books and articles, but the actual circumstances of the session are quite a bit different from those that have so frequently been repeated. Fred Gaisberg, the G&T recording engineer for the session, writing forty-two years after the fact, and knowing that he was the only surviving witness, claimed that he had made an agreement with Caruso to record ten selections for £100. He allegedly wired London for the money, and the head office allegedly replied, “Fee exorbitant, forbid you to record.” Gaisberg claimed that he decided to record anyway, and that he paid Caruso out of his own pocket. His recollections were very dramatic, very heroic, and untrue.

A 1994 article written for the *ARSC Journal* by Dr. Peter Martland, entitled “Caruso’s First Recordings: Myth and Reality,” cites documentation of everything that transpired before and after the first recording session. Based on letters and telegrams written in March and April 1902, and found in the EMI Music Archive, London, it appears that Gaisberg probably played no role in the negotiation and payment of Caruso’s fee. Martland generously forgives Gaisberg for embellishing on his role in discovering and recording Caruso, claiming that Gaisberg had written his account from memory and a few entries in his diary. Of course, being the first engineer to have recorded Caruso was no small achievement.

In March 1902, William B. Owen, the managing director of the Gramophone Company, was in Milan, where he heard Caruso sing the opera *Germania*, which had its debut that month. Owen directed Alfred Michaelis, the manager of the Milan office of the Gramophone & Typewriter Company, to negotiate a recording contract with Caruso. It appears that most of the subsequent communication over a four-week period was between Michaelis and Owen, who had returned to London.

On April 10, Michaelis advised the London office that “Caruso sings tomorrow 10 songs for £.100.” (This was the equivalent of about \$500 in 1902, a huge sum of money in that era.) He asked the head office to cable the funds to Milan. Three days later, Michaelis wired the home office in London to assure them that he had received the money, and he added, “We have taken some excellent records of Caruso—I think they will be a decided success.” According to Martland, there doesn’t appear to be any evidence that anybody had advised Gaisberg that the fee was too great a sum to pay, or that he had advanced the payment out of his own pocket.

Alan Kelly in his book *His Master’s Voice/La Voce del Padrone—The Italian Catalog*, described a recording engineer’s duties:

When actual recordings were to be made, Head Office in London sent an “expert” with his recording machine and a supply of blank discs. The expert

arrived on an agreed date, to find waiting for him a schedule of recordings to be made and a series of appointments with the artists who were to make them, all the paperwork having been compiled in advance by the branch. The expert set up his machine, prepared the zinc blanks made the recordings, packed up his equipment and departed to the next location arranged for him by Head Office. (Kelly, 1988, pp. ix–x)

This description probably applied to Gaisberg's role in the making of the 1902 recordings, although wax had since replaced zinc as the standard recording medium. It certainly seems to agree with the flow of communication between London and Milan better than does Gaisberg's account. Furthermore, we know that Gaisberg was in Rome on another assignment during the weeks prior to April 11.

Michaelis and Gaisberg were in agreement that they were well satisfied with the session. Gaisberg recalled that the ten recordings had been made without mishap. The first session was, however, a very sloppy affair. On the first record (*Germania: Studenti! Udite*), Gaisberg's etched comments can be seen on early pressings, and they include what appears to be a letter "a" and what may be the notation "1 / 3." Nobody knows what these notations actually represent, but they could indicate that alternate takes were made. Caruso made a false start in the aria *Mefistofele: Dai campi, dai prati*. He began the aria *Tosca: E lucevan le stelle* too soon and in the wrong key. He concluded the aria *Aida: Celeste Aida* in a falsetto voice, and he can be heard clearing his throat after the first verse of the aria *Rigoletto: Questa o quella*.

Michaelis and Gaisberg were in a hurry. They had recorded Amelia Pinto earlier that day, and they were scheduled to travel to Zurich at noon the following day. Both of these men had enough musical training to have noticed the errors. Certainly, Caruso and his accompanist, Salvatore Cottone, knew that mistakes had been recorded. It was careless behavior for all concerned, and alternate takes should have been made.

Despite these flaws the records created an unprecedented sensation, and in the six months following their release, the records also created a huge demand for gramophones throughout Europe. Their importance cannot be understated. Enrico Caruso, almost single-handedly, had established public confidence in the fledgling industry, and he certainly ensured the success of the Gramophone Company and its affiliates. G&T realized a profit of £13,000, which they attributed to the success of these recordings.

Because the demand for Caruso's records had not been anticipated, only one stamper had been created to press each of the ten records, and by November 1902, the stampers were showing signs of wear. The Gramophone Company managed to create duplicate stampers, with varying degrees of success, but two of the stampers were so worn that they

had to be retired. The company was anxious to replace them and to add new recordings to the catalog. They quickly made arrangements for a second session but found Caruso to be a tough negotiator. Michaelis sent a description of the negotiations to London on December 7; a week after ten new recordings had been made:

Caruso asked for Lire 3000 for the “Amor ti vieta” with Giordano’s accompaniment, or 5000 Lire for five songs. The most I could obtain was that he would repeat the Mefistofele and Aida gratis. We thus had 7 songs for 5000 lire. During the execution on Sunday, Giordano promised to get us his friend the composer Cilea to accompany Caruso and DeLuca for us in “Adriana Lecouvreur” and Caruso gave us to understand that he would do it gratis so I wired you on Monday morning to send the cheque for Lire 5000. But before the hour appointed Caruso sent word that he wanted another thousand lire for this song and as it was a most important record not only on account of Caruso but of the composer, who would not come only for DeLuca’s song, I made a new bargain with him for 3 songs for the thousand lire—the result being ten songs for 6000 lire. (EMI Archive)

There is no mention of either Umberto Giordano or Francesco Cilea being compensated for their accompaniments. The recordings are extremely important because Caruso created the tenor roles in Giordano’s *Fedora* and in Cilea’s *Adriana Lecouvreur*. The accompaniment of the composers was a great honor for Caruso, but more than that it was a clear indication that the gramophone was no longer viewed as a noisy toy. Cilea, in his accompaniment, seems to have become enraptured with Caruso’s singing, because he failed to stop playing when the engineers ran out of time. The music ends abruptly, and that adds to its appeal. The labels of the two records are interesting because Giordano’s accompaniment is not mentioned, and Cilea’s accompaniment is credited only parenthetically, in very small type. For some unknown reason, G&T did not capitalize on the promotional possibilities for either of the records, and some discographers did not even know that the composers were the pianists on these recordings.

Caruso’s recordings not only created a new source of income for singers, but they inspired some competition. In his letter of December 7, Michaelis also wrote:

Fernando De Lucia has held the last ten years the undisputed position of greatest master of Italian tenors so far as delicate singing is concerned. He has come to sing for us all the way from his country house near Naples not for the money we paid him, but because he wants the world to judge between his records and Caruso’s. (EMI Archive)

It is generally conceded today that Caruso’s decision to make recordings was rather courageous. Prior to April 1902, important entertainers could not be persuaded to make recordings. In the six months after his

initial success, some very important people—de Lucia, Cilea, and Giordano among them—began taking the Gramophone & Typewriter Company very seriously.

The Anglo-Italian Commerce Company (AICC, 1903)

All of the early Caruso discographers incorrectly assumed that his first three recordings were Pathé cylinders, followed by seven Zonofono discs. Actually, the Anglo-Italian Commerce Company in Milan made all ten recordings, and they were published and distributed by the International Zonophone Company and Pathé Frères. The cylinders, in particular, sounded as if they had been recorded very early in Caruso's career.

All ten of the AICC selections begin with spoken announcements. It has been generally assumed that the speaker was Caruso. Freestone and Drummond wrote, "Mr. Hugh Harvey, who knew the great tenor personally, and was familiar with his speaking voice, strongly inclined to the opinion that Caruso himself makes the announcements on his Zonophone records" (Freestone and Drummond, 1961, p. 6). However, Hernán L. Vigo Suarez, in correspondence with me, states:

I categorically assure you that Caruso's Pathés and Zonofoni are not announced by the singer! Regarding the Pathés, one announcer is heard on *E lucevan le stelle* and *Qui sotto il ciel*, while a totally different announcer is heard in *Tu non mi vuoi più bene*. On all seven Zonofoni, however, the same announcer is heard. Why do I say Caruso is not the announcer: first of all, the spoken voice of a singer is usually "placed" as when he/she sings, and the announcers in the Pathés are not particularly sweet-voiced. The Zonofoni are quite another story. Caruso's begin with X-1550 and end with X-1556. When you listen to the announcements on the adjacent numbers from X-1534 to X-1549, and from X-1557 to X-1600, it is immediately noticeable that the same male voice is announcing all of them, and it is exactly the same announcer as in the Caruso Zonofoni. (Hernán L. Vigo Suarez, e-mail, August 2002)

Jack Caiden produced one of the earliest lists of Caruso's recordings. It was published as an appendix in Dorothy Caruso's 1945 biography of her husband, *Enrico Caruso, His Life and Death*. Mr. Caiden dated the cylinders as early as 1898–1899. John Secrist, a contributor to Francis Robinson's book, *Enrico Caruso, His Life in Pictures*, concluded that the cylinders had been made in 1901. And both of these gentlemen also believed that the Zonofono recordings predated the Gramophone & Typewriter recordings.

An excellent bit of discographical research done by Martin Sokol corrected all of the earlier assumptions. In an article published by *Antique Phonograph Monthly* in 1977, Sokol provided documentation that the Zonofono and Pathé recordings were all made in 1903.

The Zonofono Discs

On April 19, 1903, Caruso recorded seven selections for AICC. The German headquarters of the International Zonophone Company pressed them with light-blue Disco Zonofono labels. These records are legendary for their rarity and for the prices collectors pay for them. Two of the selections were songs, rather than operatic arias, and Caruso made a much better recording of the *Tosca* aria than he had done a year earlier for G&T. The recordings don't seem to be as well recorded as those he had made for G&T, and some of them appear to change speed, causing a variation of pitch when they are played. Early pressings have "The Anglo-Italian Commerce Company—Genova—Milano," the initials "A.I.C.C.," and the words "Marca Depositata" and "I Migliori del Mondo" pressed on the reverse.

In the summer of 1903, the Gramophone & Typewriter Company bought the European branch of the Zonophone Company, and all of its recordings were moved to the G&T factory in Hanover, Germany. The Zonophone Company had been a major competitor for talent throughout Europe, and the purchase solidified G&T's dominance of the record industry in that area of the world. G&T continued to manufacture many of the selections in the Zonophone catalog, including the seven Caruso recordings that were sold with the Zonofono light blue label. Records pressed by G&T have the word Zonofono embossed twice at right angles and "Reproduced in Germany" embossed on the reverse side. They were sold for the same price as the G&T red-label Caruso records.

In 1907 G&T officials in London discovered that the records were still being sold, and they requested information about how many had been pressed. After reviewing the report from the factory, G&T ordered them to stop pressing the records, and to set the stampers aside. The following totals and final pressing dates were reported for each Zonofono catalog number:

Number	Sold	Last date
X-1550	710	11/01/07
X-1551	650	11/01/07
X-1552	1369	1/11/06
X-1553	1486	4/03/07
X-1554	773	21/01/07
X-1555	1115	1/11/06
X-1556	1394	13/03/07

(Source: EMI Archive)

Statistics have not survived for the International Zonophone Company, so it is not known how many Zonofono pressings were ever sold, but G&T

sold 7,297 copies between 1903 and 1907. There doesn't appear to have been much interest in the two songs, *Un bacio ancora* and *Luna fedel* (X-1550 and X-1551, respectively). *Luna fedel* and the *Germania* aria (X-1554) were also available as G&T recordings, which may account for the small number of copies pressed in Hanover.

In 1938, Canon H. J. Drummond wrote to the Gramophone Company inquiring about the Zonophone stampers. An agent for the company responded, "The shells for these numbers do not exist in our Hayes factory, and we do not think they would be found in any other factory." The stampers were last used on March 13, 1907, in Hanover, and they have never been found. (EMI Archive)

One of the more curious discoveries concerns a Caruso Zonofono record that was marketed by another company. According to Bayly & Kinnear (2001), Zonofono Record X-1553, *Tosca: E lucevan le stelle*, was sold by Antiqua Casa Banque von J. Balaguer of Beleaes, Spain. A label bearing the trademark Discophon had been pasted over the blue Zonofono label, and the record was assigned catalog number 1006. The company spared no expense in this production; the title, Caruso's name, and the catalog number are all handwritten.

There is an extremely rare double-sided Zonofono record that has Caruso's *Rigoletto: La donna è mobile* with a blue label on one side. The reverse has an orange label and is a recording by the Casa Edison Band of a song entitled *Esperanca*. The text on the orange label reads, "Impresso specialmente para a Casa Edison Rio de Janiero." This may one of the earliest commercially released double-sided records.

The Pathé Cylinders and Discs

In late October 1903, Caruso made three more recordings in Milan for the Anglo-Italian Commerce Company, and the French company, Pathé Frères, released these. According to Freestone and Drummond:

While much about the early histories of these records is uncertain it is worth remembering that strictly speaking they are not Pathé recordings. Though made for and handled by Pathé Frères, they are all announced as being made by the Anglo-Italian Commerce Co. (Freestone and Drummond, 1962, p. 1)

The Pathé records were sold in two forms—cylinders and discs—and they were recorded using the vertical cut, or "hill-and-dale," process. Both types required a different kind of phonograph than that being sold by the Gramophone Company. The young industry had not yet resolved which method of recording would prevail. In the vertical-cut recording technique, invented by Thomas Edison, the sound wave is recorded into the bottom

of the groove, and a stylus that floats up-and-down in the groove produces the sound. Emile Berliner invented the lateral recording process, used by G&T and the Victor Talking Machine Company. The sound is recorded onto the sides of the groove, and the stylus vibrating against the walls of the groove produces the sound.

The early Pathé discs are played from the center of the record out to the edge. This may have been developed to avoid any conflict with Berliner's patented method of playing the record from the outside edge to the center of the record. Pathé released single-sided and double-sided discs with several combinations of Caruso recordings, some of which used recordings by another artist on the reverse side. The cylinders and the discs also come in a variety of widths and sizes. This all had to be confusing and expensive for the consumer. The discs ranged in size from nine to fourteen inches in diameter, the predominant size being eleven inches, and:

The original cylinders seem to have been those of three and one half inches in diameter, often spoken of as "middle size" or "Inter" to distinguish them from the subsequently issued cylinders which had diameters of just over two inches, and the "Stentor" and "Celeste" issues with their five inch diameters. (Freestone and Drummond, 1961, p. 1)

Caruso recorded the Pathé selections onto a master cylinder, as opposed to a wax disc. As a result, all of the Pathé cylinders and discs were manufactured from molds and stampers that were made by transcribing or pantographing the master cylinder. For this reason these three recordings may sound rather distant. Nonetheless, it is surprising that early discographers thought that they had been recorded five years earlier because one of the recordings was an aria from the opera *Tosca*, which had its premiere in 1900.

There have been many rumors about how many recordings Caruso may have attempted for AICC. Leonard Petts (1975) believed that there was an eighth Zonofono recording in March, and collectors have speculated there may have been at least one more recording in October. The three Pathé catalog numbers were 84003, 84004, and 84006, and it has been suggested that another Caruso recording had been planned for 84005. Unfortunately, complete documentation has not been found for either session, and we do not know the financial details for either session. However, there are no unassigned Zonofono or Pathé catalog numbers adjacent to any of the various Caruso releases.

Early Pathé records and cylinders did not have paper labels. The details of each recording were pressed with white or yellow paint into the center of the discs, or onto the edge of the rim on the cylinders. The earliest discs that were published in 1905 were made of a wax-surfaced, cement-like substance. They were harsh-sounding and far to fragile, and they were replaced with shellac pressings later that year. The cylinders came in boxes,

GRAMOPHONE & TYPEWRITER CO.**Milan, Friday, April 11, 1902**

Note: All ten of these records were remastered for stamper II and all subsequent pressings.

1 Germania: Studenti! Udite “Presentazione di Frederico”

Matrix 1782 — accompanied by Cottone, piano 71.29 rpm

a. G&T 52378 —

Remastered:

b. G&T 52378 — Repr. etched at three o'clock position

c. Victor 5015 — Not released

d. H.M.V. DA 544 (7)

e. H.M.V. VA 37 (7)

2 Rigoletto: Questa o quella (Caruso clears his throat after the first verse)

Matrix 1783 — accompanied by Cottone, piano 71.29 rpm

a. G&T 52344 —

Remastered:

b. G&T 52344 — CO. embossed at three o'clock position

3 Aida: Celeste Aida (Final note sung falsetto, ends with two piano chords)

Matrix 1784 — accompanied by Cottone, piano 71.29 rpm

a. G&T 52369 — Type 1, see number 13

Remastered:

b. G&T 52369 — Stamper II is not marked as a copy

4 Manon: Chiudo gli occhi “Il sogno”

Matrix 1785 — accompanied by Cottone, piano 71.29 rpm

a. G&T 52345 —

Remastered:

b. G&T 52345 — CO. embossed at three o'clock position

c. H.M.V. VA 58 (12) As “O dolce incanto”

5 L'Elisir d'Amore: Una furtiva lagrima

Matrix 1786 — accompanied by Cottone, piano 71.29 rpm

a. G&T 52346 —

Remastered:

b. G&T 52346 — CO. embossed at three o'clock position

Note: Numbers in parentheses refer to the item on the reverse side of double-faced records.

6 Mefistofele: Giunto sul passo estremo

Matrix 1787 — accompanied by Cottone, piano 71.29 rpm

a. G&T 52347 —

Remastered:

b. G&T 52347 — CO. embossed at three o'clock position

c. H.M.V. DA 550 (11)

d. H.M.V. VA7 (11)

7 Germania: Ah, vieni qui... No, non chiuder gli occhi vaghi

Matrix 1788 — accompanied by Cottone, piano 71.29 rpm

a. G&T 52370 —

Remastered:

b. G&T 52370 — CO. embossed at three o'clock position

c. Victor 5013 — Not released

d. Victor 91012 — Not released

e. H.M.V. DA 544 (1)

f. H.M.V. VA 37 (1)

8 Mefistofele: Dai campi, dai prati (Caruso starts two beats early)

Matrix 1789 — accompanied by Cottone, piano. 71.29 rpm

a. G&T 52348 — Type 1, see number 11

Remastered:

b. G&T 52348 — Stamper II is not marked as a copy

9 Tosca: E lucevan le stelle (Caruso starts in wrong place and wrong key)

Matrix 1790 — accompanied by Cottone, piano 71.29 rpm

a. G&T 52349 — As "E lucevan le stelle"

Remastered:

b. G&T 52349 — CO. embossed at three o'clock position

c. Victor 5010 —

d. Victor 91009 —

e. H.M.V. DA 547 (14)

f. H.M.V. VA 29 (14)

10 Iris: Apri la tua finestra "Serenata"

Matrix 1791 — accompanied by Cottone, piano 71.29 rpm

a. G&T 52368 —

Remastered:

b. G&T 52368 — CO. embossed at three o'clock position