

subsequent recordings of Dutchman to this day mostly serve primarily to document the enormous world decline in Wagnerian singing since mid-20th century.)

In Paul Jackson's Sign-Off for the Old Met: The Metropolitan Opera Broadcasts, 1950-1966 (Amadeus Press, Portland OR, 1997) in which he writes of the Met broadcast performance, after decrying the lack of subtlety of Schippers' overdriven conducting, the author describes London's bass-baritone as a near ideal Dutchman's voice. Its potent dose of the zealot's intensity, harnessed to the boldness of his delivery, transmits a fearsome single-mindedness. Like Hotter, London imbues his tone with anguish, but unlike Hotter, he intermingles menace with pain—the combination well serves to characterize the despairing Vanderdecken. My only complaint is that London consistently plays at so impassioned a pitch that some interpretive subtleties are forsaken—weight and color of tone seldom vary. But the portrait has such size, such granitic force, that magnitude in itself implements characterization. ...The bass-baritone is in superlative voice, and his instrument grows in power, steadiness and, above all, tonal purity throughout the afternoon. Like burning coals now glowing red, now white with heat, the firm tones which he pours into the climax of the duet with Senta are indeed worthy of legend. ... Of course, London is mighty in his denunciation of Senta, and he is untroubled by the high tessitura.

Under Doráti's highly expressive flexibility, as captured by RCA only a few months after the Met broadcast (especially as now heard on pitch), London was undoubtedly able to incorporate more subtlety into his great interpretation than Jackson heard in the Met broadcast, yet with the same noted virtues intact.

Jackson continues with his discussion of Rysanek's famous Senta, in which she manages to incorporate perceived vocal shortcomings into convincing aspects of her intense character portrayal, redeemed further by the gleaming power of her upper tones and the expressiveness of her pianissimi. He notes:

As Senta pledges faithfulness unto death, the soprano's triumph is complete. Is it danger that vibrates in those top notes and makes Rysanek so intriguing an artist, a heroine singing on the edge, abandon and exaltation captured in the cutting brilliance of her tone? She is an artist who markets rapture as though it were her daily bread. The soprano retains vocal control in the final scene as well, her instrument well-channeled as Senta's [final phrase] fiercely slices the air and pierces our hearts. ... The tang is the aftertaste of ecstasy.

These aspects of Rysanek's broadcast performance are heard equally in the subsequent RCA recording that shortly followed.

One cannot divorce the technical aspects of a recording from the emotional impact that the recording makes on listeners, and we believe that HDTT's new presentation of this historic early stereo Dutchman recording, heard for the first time on pitch and with previously unheard hi-def clarity, provides a much more powerful and moving listening experience of this chilling, brine-drenched, ghost-story opera. It also much more accurately serves the reputations of the outstanding singers and conductor heard in this resplendent recording.

By John H. Haley  
Harmony Restorations LLC

(grateful thanks to Richard Hess for his always very knowledgeable technical analysis)

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## *The Flying Dutchman*

George London • Leonie Rysanek • Giorgio Tozzi  
Karl Lieb! • Richard Lewis • Rosalind Elias

Orchestra & Chorus of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden • ANTAL DORATI, conductor



HDTT has just given this important historical Der fliegende Holländer recording a new lease on life, presenting it for the first time with the pervasive pitch anomalies corrected, dramatically changing what we hear. Led by conductor Antal Doráti, it was recorded in 1960 at Walthamstow Town Hall in London with one of the greatest casts ever assembled for a recording of this opera—George London as the Dutchman, Leonie Rysanek as Senta, Giorgio Tozzi as Daland, Karl Liebl as Erik, Rosalind Elias as Mary, and Richard Lewis as the Steersman. Released on RCA Living Stereo LPs in 1961, this was one of those joint efforts between RCA and Decca/London that ultimately reverted to the latter, which reissued it on LP and CD several times over the decades since its original RCA release. The original engineers were the legendary "Living Stereo" team of Richard Mohr, producer, and Lewis Layton, recording engineer. Sourced from a rare Living Stereo reel-to-reel tape, HDTT's outstanding high definition transfer vividly captures the rich Walthamstow acoustic with great clarity and spatial definition. Under Doráti's dynamic leadership, the Covent Garden Orchestra (perhaps augmented?), plays like one of the world's major orchestral ensembles. The recording is of the continuous "one act" version that Wagner first envisioned before breaking the opera into three discreet acts.

But, ..... all of the prior releases of this recording are afflicted with a bad technical botch, being frequent pitch variations covering a large pitch spread of approximately 3%, which is well over a quarter tone, ranging both above and below the accurate pitch. Disconcertingly, the pitch often wanders around multiple times within a single scene—even in the Overture—even leaving two singers stranded in different pitch worlds in duets. The resulting "seasickness" on the listener's part was not part of Wagner's intended oceanic sound world.

It is apparent how this botch occurred. As with most commercial opera recordings, there are a great many tape splices, as the opera would not have been recorded in sequence, nor with all personnel always present at the same time. Apparently unknown to everyone at the recording sessions, the tape recorder(s) being used was/were not consistently operating at precisely the same speed throughout the proceedings, caused either by (1) a basic equipment malfunction, or (2) variation of the frequency of the current mains powering that equipment from a steady 50 cycles, affecting the speed of the tape recorder motors (although 3% would have been quite a large variation). There is no pattern of consistency as to the pitch spread, there are instances of sliding pitch, and tellingly, many of the pitch shifts occur at splice points that are audible and/or visible on a computer screen in today's high definition transfer (all audible splices have all been repaired). There is a known phenomenon of pitch changes occurring at either end of a large reel of tape caused by a tape transport that cannot maintain perfect speed, which could conceivably have played some part, but that would not explain the pervasiveness of the problem.

The problem most likely first came to light once the recording sessions were over and the various personnel had dispersed, with most of the label's recording budget having been spent. Editing decisions had no doubt been made, probably with Doráti's participation, before the time when some label employee, using the editing notes, sat down to execute the indicated tape splices, at which time the pitch mismatches would have been quite apparent. It is impossible that those editing the tape did not notice the problem, yet, obviously, splice it up they did, and out it went.

Some effort was probably made to locate splice points in the music where the pitch shifts would be less jarring, no doubt taking advantage, where possible, of the general harmonic discontinuity to the ear that results naturally from Wagner's frequent use of diminished chords, which saturate this score. To the extent such artfulness succeeded in absolving the sins of those responsible for the technical problems of this recording, it simultaneously (and unfairly) dumped responsibility for the prevailing pitch

queasiness into the laps of the performers.

The present restoration corrects all of the audible pitch anomalies, so for the first time this very special recording can be heard in tune, as the music was gloriously performed at the recording sessions. The restoration efforts have consisted of such pitch correction (carried out manually), very slight hiss removal, splice and dropout repair (there are very few dropouts), correcting obvious level imbalances, and removal of occasional non-musical noises, such as coughs (yes, at a recording session). Nothing has been done to disturb the naturally reverberant Walthamstow acoustic—no reverb or EQ of any kind has been applied, and apart from pitch correction, the restoration work has been minimally invasive. Prior releases of this recording have raised suspicions on the part of some listeners of added fake reverb, but based on the clarity of the present hi-def transfer, we disagree, at least with respect to the source used here.

Finally hearing this recording on pitch makes a world of difference. Three percent is a quite large pitch spread, one that seriously impairs the vocal tone of operatic singers. Vocally, the great George London was arguably the best equipped Dutchman of the 20th Century (indisputably in the latter half), but heard in the uncertain pitch world of this Dutchman recording as previously released, he can seem to be singing out of tune in spots, as well as his being afflicted in a few places with some unsteadiness of tone, exaggerated by the slowing down of his natural vibrato. For the most part these flaws either disappear or become negligible when the pitch has been corrected, and in fact as heard now it is clear that London was very near his top form in this recording. Without the false perception of vocal flaws, he is now interpretively an even more magnificent Dutchman.

Rysanek's highly characterful singing is damaged even worse by the pitch variations in the recording as previously released. A great deal of her role appears to have been captured with the overall pitch being flat upon playback. As spliced in together with other singers and ensembles playing back at a higher pitch (sometimes sharp), she too often comes off as singing decidedly flat. In fact, as now revealed, her pitch in this recording was secure, helping to create a far more convincing portrayal of what many would argue was her greatest role.

The recording captures the strong cast of a rapturously received run of performances at the Metropolitan Opera by the four major principals, London, Rysanek, Tozzi and Liebl, there conducted by Thomas Schippers, only a few months earlier. The opera was presented eight times in the latter part of the 1959-1960 season, with four of those performances featuring these same four principals, including the broadcast of March 15, 1960. Other performances substituted some other singers, and a number of the members this first cast appeared in this opera in subsequent seasons, along with others. It was no accident that RCA immediately sought to record these four "first-cast" principals, preserving their collective recent Met success for posterity, and it was an inspired choice to line up maestro Antal Doráti to conduct, even though he was not particularly known, then or now, as an operatic conductor.

This great cast is justly famous for this opera, even having taken on legendary status. In Kenn Harris' book *Opera Recordings: a Critical Guide* (Drake Publishers, New York, 1973), after praising the RCA recording as "in most ways the most effective performance" of the four modern recordings then available, the author pointed out (p. 124) that Doráti, "in one of his only operatic recordings, comes closest to fully capturing the brooding, Romantic qualities of the work and to shaping a theatrically effective reading." He continued: "The cast is taken entirely from the mid-century revivals [the opera] that rank among the best achievements of the Bing regime at the Metropolitan Opera." (While beyond the scope of this discussion, it can be safely said that

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| 01. Overture (11:14)                                     | 14. Bleib, Senta! Bleib nur einem Augenblick! (8:45)               |
| 02. ACT I. Hojoho! Holloho! (5:02)                       | 15. Auf hohem Felsen lag ich träumend (5:26)                       |
| 03. Mit Gewitter und Sturm aus fernem Meer (5:45)        | 16. Mein Kind, du siehst mich auf der Schwelle (1:10)              |
| 04. Die Frist ist um (12:42)                             | 17. Mögst du, mein Kind, den fremden Mann willkommen heißen (6:19) |
| 05. He! Holla! Steuermann! (4:14)                        | 18. Wie aus der Ferne längst vergang'ner Zeiten (6:41)             |
| 06. Durch Sturm und bösen Wind verschlagen (4:26)        | 19. Wirst du des Vaters Wahl nicht schelten? (7:46)                |
| 07. Wie? Hör' ich recht? Meine Tochter sein Weib? (8:50) | 20. Verzeiht! Mein Volk hält draußen sich nicht mehr (2:39)        |
| 08. Mit Gewitter und Sturm (2:17)                        | 21. ACT III. Steuermann, laß die Wacht! (10:55)                    |
| 09. ACT II. Summ und brumm, du gutes Rädchen (4:09)      | 22. Johohoho! Johohohoe! Hoe! Hoe! (3:53)                          |
| 10. Du böses Kind (5:30)                                 | 23. Was muß' ich hören (2:32)                                      |
| 11. Johohoe! Traft ihr das Schiff im Meere an (6:58)     | 24. Willst jenes Tags du nicht dich mehr entsinnen (2:59)          |
| 12. Ach! Wo weit sie (1:29)                              | 25. Verloren! Ach, Verloren! (2:42)                                |
| 13. Senta! Senta! Willst du mich verderben? (2:11)       | 26. Erfahre das Geschick, vor dem ich dich bewahr'! (3:03)         |
|  | 27. Du kennst mich nicht (3:17)                                    |

Recorded by RCA at London, Walthamstow Town Hall, 1960  
Engineer [Recording] - Lewis Layton    Producer - Richard Mohr



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