

# The voice of Enrico Caruso

in collaboration with

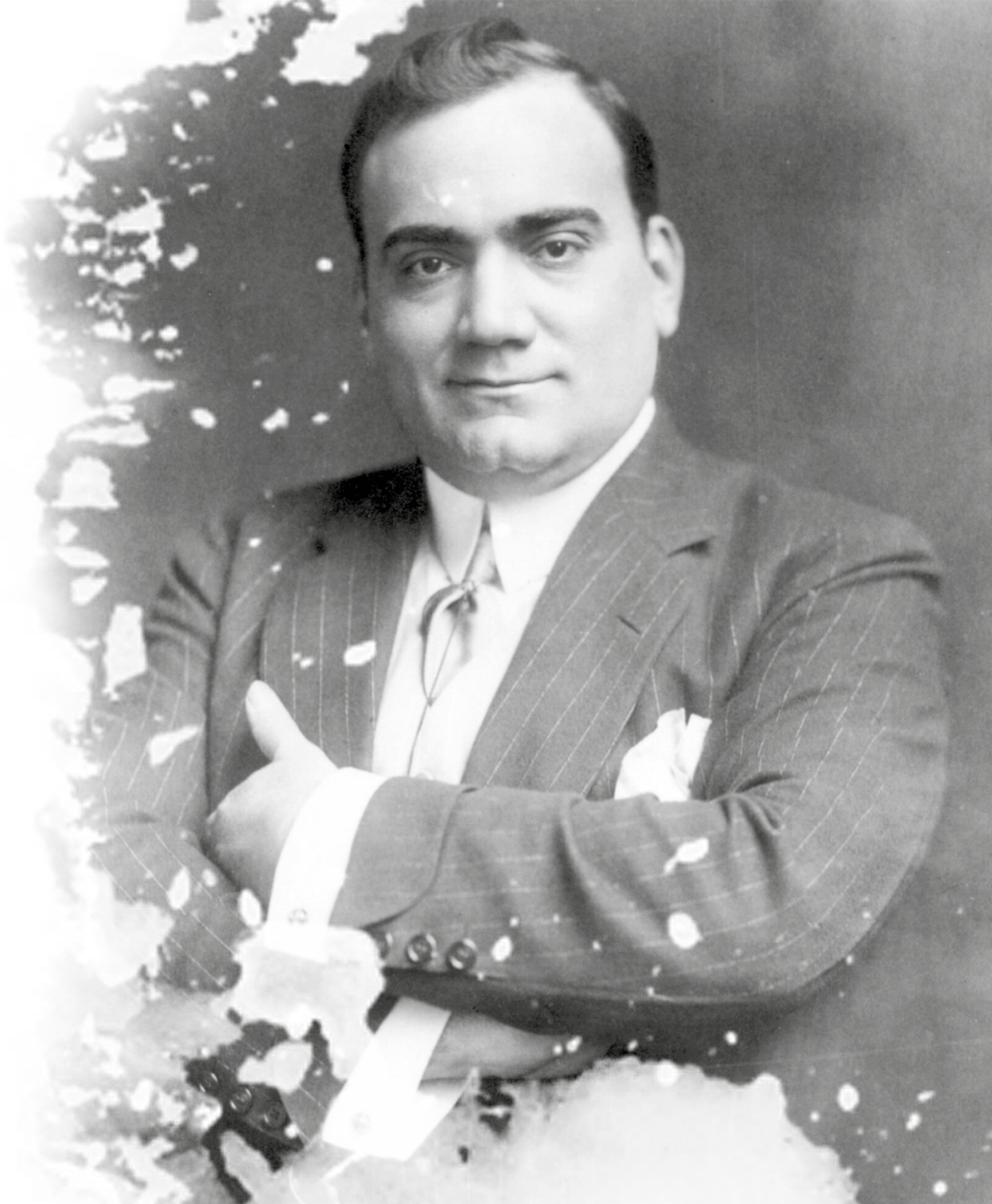
Istituto Centrale per i Beni Sonori ed Audiovisivi and  
Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione



Directed by  
**Simona Risi**

Screenplay  
**Gabriele Raimondi**

Documentary 60'



# Background

This documentary tells the story of a research and a discovery that brings us for the first time to the possibility of listening to the **correct rotation speed of the sound the 10 edited tracks recorded by Enrico Caruso on April 11, 1902** in Milan. Caruso recorded them at the **Grand Hotel et de Milan**, before leaving for the United States and becoming a world star. It's an **unpublished listening** because it is the tracks are offered to the listener exactly as the tenor sang them with the true voice of Enrico Caruso and this allows to have a comparison with the versions so far diffuse. In fact, at the time of registration of these ten matrices, it was not lent no attention to the laps used for playback and the emerging record companies adjusted revolutions exclusively in function of the space they had available on the physical support. The fruition was totally subjective, it was the listener who adjusted the speed of your gramophone. **This exciting unedited listening is the result of a recent and innovative study by the Istituto Centrale per i Beni Sonori ed Audiovisivi - whose results have not yet been published** - realized thanks to an in-depth study of sources, i.e. the discovery and analysis of ancient catalogs in which the correct laps at which to play the tracks, and the scholarly advice.



A handwritten signature of Enrico Caruso in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style, with the first name 'Enrico' clearly visible and the last name 'Caruso' following in a similar script. There is a long, sweeping underline that extends across the bottom of the signature.

# The history of registration

**Milan, 1902.** In the corridors and the hall of the Grand Hotel et de Milan is still being talked about Giuseppe Verdi's death in January of the previous year, right in the luxurious hotel often welcoming the musicians and singers who perform at the Teatro alla Scala. The owner, Mr. Spatz, is the brother-in-law of composer Umberto Giordano. We are in the Milan of the beginning of the 20th century, in Italy's cultural capital: international musicians, as well as young and talented artists, flock to the cafes, theaters and art ateliers. Right there, at the Grand Hotel et de Milan, is about to begin a cultural revolution, is about to be born a new star in the musical firmament world: **Enrico Caruso**. In the rooms of the third floor the young tenor, still little known to the general public, sings in front of a newly invention, accompanied on the piano by master Salvatore Cottone. It is the engraving that **will start the mass record industry**.

Fred Gaisberg, an ingenious American expert in the new sound machines, firmly believes in these new contraptions, and is convinced that within a few years, finally the music of the great interpreters and large orchestras will be able to reach the homes of enthusiasts. The young English company The Gramophone Company Ltd had been established in 1899. Initially named The Gramophone & Typewriter, it will scale the heights of the market worldwide under the name of "His Master's Voice" or "The voice of the master" from the title of the painting by Francis Barraud that portrays the little dog Nipper while listening to a gramophone, the label's trademark. The goal of the company is to promote in Europe the machines of the inventor Emile Berliner through a clever and aggressive industrial policy that will bring the dog Nipper in the major European cities among which there is, of course, Milan. In Milan to welcome the representatives of Gramophone there is Alfred Michaelis, enterprising and pioneering entrepreneur of the young sector of the reproduction, who will become the Director of The Gramophone Company Italy within a year. Michaelis does know the world of music, Italian artists and the Milanese music scene and has become therefore the natural interlocutor of Fred Gaisberg.





**Fred Gaisberg, pianist and artistic manager,** arrives in Italy together with his brother Will: they want to record some performances of the tenor Alessandro Bonci, but as suggested by Michaelis, they also go to the **Teatro alla Scala** where there is a young tenor singing in Germany: Enrico Caruso. Michaelis wasn't wrong, the performance attending in La Scala is unforgettable: Fred Gaisberg is thrilled by the power, the timbre and the versatility of Caruso's voice. Gaisberg therefore changes the programs established by the English company and **decides to record the Neapolitan Caruso.** He succeeds to obtain from Caruso the promise of record 10 tracks from his repertoire for the sum of £100. An enormity by then, so much so that the parent company, from England, prohibits him from continuing the operation because it's too expensive. But Gaisberg knows that this is an unmissable opportunity, does his own thing and fixes the engraving session for the afternoon of **Friday, April 11.** But first he has another mission: he goes to Rome with his brother Will to record the voice of **Pope Leone XIII.** They will not succeed in the enterprise but in the Vatican they will succeed in record the voice of Alessandro Moreschi. We are in 1902, Moreschi is the last castrato of the Sistine Chapel and for the two brothers he records as many as 20 tracks.

Right on time, on April 11, 1902, Fred Gaisberg returns to Milan. In the morning, at the Grand Hotel et de Milan, he records 10 pieces by the soprano Amelia Pinto, paying them £40. **In the afternoon it is Enrico Caruso's turn.** Gaisberg, an expert in engraving techniques, understands immediately that the powerful and round Caruso's voice can get along with the metal cone that collects the sound by vibrating the stylus that engraves on the rotating wax disc.



Caruso sings standing in front of that funnel of tin while, behind him, Salvatore Cottone plays an upright piano placed on a raised base, so as to be in line with the horn of the machine.

Two hours of work, a few repeated tracks twice and there you have it: *“Caruso, fresh and jovial, made its appearance in our auditorium and in two hours exactly sang ten arias, accompanied on the piano by maestro Cottone”*

These are the tracks

*Rigoletto: “Questa o quella”.*

*Manon: “O dolce incanto”.*

*Elisir d’amore: “Una furtiva lagrima”.*

*Mephistopheles: “Giunto sul passo estremo”.*

*Mephistopheles: “Dai campi dai prati”.*

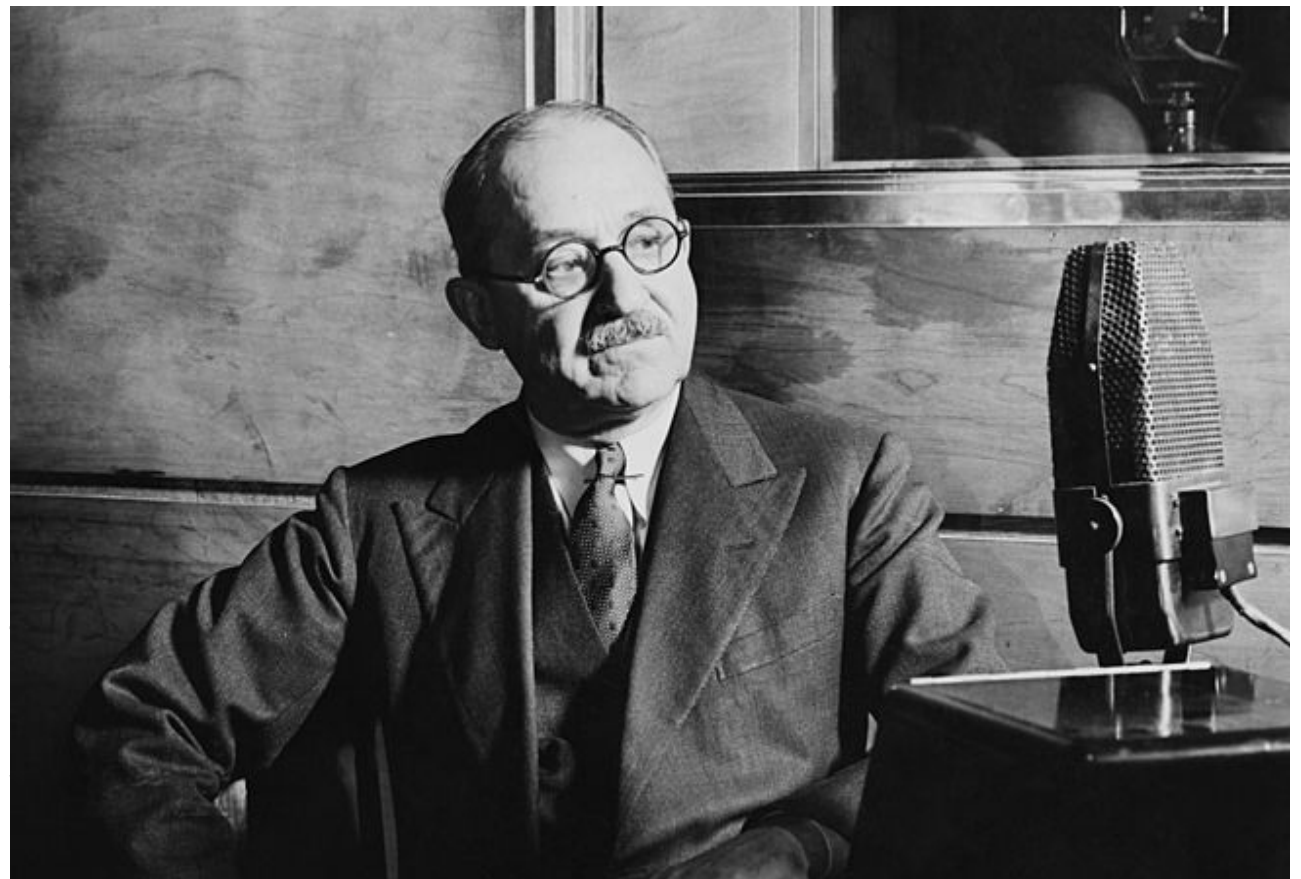
“Not a single cue, imperfection or obfuscation, disturbed this recording.”

(F. W. Gaisberg, *The Music Goes Round*, 1943, then *Music on Record*, Italian edition F.lli Bocca, Milan 1949 / pp. 661-62).

The next day, Saturday, April 12, 1902, the Gaisberg brothers send the discs of the engravings of Enrico Caruso to the printers of Hanover the wax and leave for Zurich. After a few months, the £100 of Caruso’s cachet for the recording **will yield hundreds of thousands.**

**Caruso will be the very first singer in the history of the discography to surpass the million records sold. Is it the nascent record industry that created Caruso or is it thanks to Caruso that the mass discography was born?**

Certainly, by now the world is changing: the speed of the new means of transport changes the geographical perspective; moving images imprinted on film enchant viewers and baffle painters. The sophistication of the mechanical contraptions brings **music in the homes of everyone**, or almost: the gramophone is very expensive and only a few can afford it; **but music begins its journey and by now the new medium is destined to make history.**



In the months and times to come, so many want to be Caruso, so many want to record discs. And so that devilry - which some time before most of the musicians, singers and composers snubbed by calling it a toy - becomes in fact a powerful means of communication, entertainment and culture, as well as historical memory. A little more than a year after Caruso's recording in Milan, on November 11, 1903, Enrico Caruso and his partner Ada Giachetti set off for New York, on the transoceanic SS Sardinia, for the much-desired debut at the Metropolitan. The Caruso's in New York are taken by limousine to the Majestic Hotel, on the 72nd Street, Central Park West. The engagement had been mediated by an Italian banker from New York, Pasquale Simonelli. On November 23rd the debut with *Rigoletto*. This was followed by *Aida* and then *Tosca*, *Bohème*, *Traviata*. In less than three months, Caruso leaves America with twenty-nine public appearances (twenty-five in New York and four in Philadelphia) and a series of private concert. But by now **his voice travels even without him**, because **the record industry finally found its very first pop star**.





# Director's Notes

**For this documentary** ICCD and ICBSA let us access the historic gramophones and machinery of the time, coming from different periods, the same that recorded the first records in music history. Such wonderful devices, as they are mysterious in their use. In 1902 in Milan, Enrico Caruso's voice was recorded on wax cylinders and we will play that first recording recreating that atmosphere through the devices of the time. Regarding the archives, we have resorted to two videos taken from American archives and the silent film made by Caruso **that was recently found and restored by the Cineteca di Bologna**. The filming of the recreated recording - made to the highest standards of the film production, optics cinema and 4K cameras - are the fil rouge of the documentary, whose narrative also presents **the life of Caruso**, especially between **Naples and Milan**, before the American adventure which we obviously mention, a life told through contemporary images and precious archives of the early 1900s.

In Milan, the rooms of the Teatro alla Scala evoke the singer's presence during that extraordinary season. ICBSA's historical museum is a special set: it provides us with the wax cylinders of the time and we makes it possible for us to listen to the voice of Antonio Moreschi after 120 years. We visited both Caruso's birthplace in Naples, today a museum, is the hotel Excelsior Victoria in Sorrento, where the tenor lived in the last period of his life. And also the spectacular Villa Caruso of Bellosguardo in Lastra a Signa that the tenor purchased following a walk in the company of the beloved Ada Giachetti, when both remained impressed by the magnificent panorama and monumental and scenic park. Even the film library of Bologna accompanies you on this journey where we view the silent movie just restored by the Cineteca, in which the tenor is starring. In addition, we have drawings and caricatures available that Caruso has made over the years with talent and wit, many of which are kept by ICBSA itself.

The documentary allows us to **dive in the atmosphere of the early 1900s**, when the tracks were recorded, and transports us to the iconic places that saw the birth of Caruso's career and discography, with a **filmic synergy between music and images**.



# Interviews

**GAETANO BONELLI**

Director of Enrico Caruso House Museum - Naples

**RAFFAELE REALE**

President of Enrico Caruso House Museum - Naples

**LIDIA FIORENTINO**

Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria - Sorrento

**DAVIDE MONTELLA**

Musicologist and tenor

**UGO PIOVANO**

Caruso Museum Association - Milan

**GABRIELLA RAVENNI**

President of Giacomo Puccini Study Center

**MICHAEL ASPINALL**

Musicologist and singer

**BARBARA BOGANINI**

ICAMUS - International Center for American Music

**SIMONA FRASCA**

Ethnomusicologist

**GIULIANA MUSCIO**

Film Historian

**MARK MILHOFER**

Tenor

**VINCENZO DE VIVO**

Music organizer

**SILVIA PAOLA BAZOLI**

Villa Bellosguardo - Caruso Museum - Lastra a Signa

**LUCA CERCHIARI**

musicologist

**PAOLA CAMPONOVO**

musicologist and soprano

**MASSIMILIANO LOPEZ**

ICBSA - Central Institute for Sound and Audiovisual Assets

**CARLO BIRROZZI**

Director ICCD-ICBSA

**GIAN LUCA FARINELLI**

Director Cineteca - Bologna





# Note on the study philological

In 2021, on the centenary of the death of Enrico Caruso, the Central Institute for the Sound and Audiovisual Heritage has promoted an in-depth study of the material discography of the great Italian tenor kept in its archives. The Caruso-ICBSA fund study has therefore as a primary purpose, not the umpteenth biographical-musical analysis of the great tenor, but technical aspects related to choices made by the recording industry, both in the initial phase (the one, to be clear, of the shellac editions) and the one of the “reissues”, in order to capture the any differences between the age of the vinyl and that of the digital medium.

The most sensitive issue that has emerged is refers to the rotation speed of the disks made from 1902 to 1920: since there is no in those years still a speed standard in the speed of engraving record media, the various companies phonographs recorded and printed discs spinning at disparate speeds, motivated more by the needs of economy in the exploitation of the sound space provided arrangement from the surface of the disc purely musical reasons. Arbitrary disc rotation placed being listened to by the buyer changed the actual item of Enrico Caruso. ICBSA and specialized personnel fund study officer **have put to develop a dedicated computer system to digital speed correction of rotation** of each individual 78 rpm record, whose results will therefore allow enjoy unprecedented listening.

Another issue that emerged through the study of the Caruso-ICBSA fund, linked essentially to discographic reissues made electrically, is that of possible “overrides”: the great request for Carusian repertoire by a rapidly growing record market prompted discographers to make re-recordings of the orchestral parts with more modern, superimposing music over original recordings of Caruso. The result was that of a proto-over engraving; also in this case the figure of Enrico Caruso, who had been deceased for years, turned out to be cutting edge.

