

MARIO DEL MONACO – A CRITICAL APPROACH

BY DANIELE GODOR, XII 2009

INTRODUCTION

Mario del Monaco belongs to a group of singers who are sacrosanct to many opera listeners. Too impressive are the existing documents of his interpretations of *Otello* (no other tenor has more recordings of the role of *Otello* than Del Monaco who claimed to have sung to role 427 times¹), *Radames*, *Cavaradossi*, *Samson*, *Don José* and so on. His technique is seen as the non-plus-ultra by many singers and fans: almost indefatigable – comparable to Lauritz Melchior in this regard –, with a solid two octave register and capable of producing beautiful, virile and ringing sound of great volume. His most important teacher, Arturo Melocchi, finally became famous through Del Monaco's fame, and a new school was born: the so-called Melocchians worked with the technique of Melocchi and the bonus of the most well-established exponent of his



technique – Mario del Monaco. Del Monaco, the “Otello of the century” and “the Verdi tenor” (Giancarlo del Monaco)² is – as these attributes suggest – a singer almost above reproach and those critics, who pointed out some of his shortcomings, were few. In the New York Times, the famous critic Olin Downes dubbed del Monaco “the tenor of tenors” after del Monaco’s debut as Andrea Chenier in New York.³ For many tenors, del Monaco was the great idol and founder of a new tradition: On his CD issued by the Legato label, Lando Bartolini claims to be a singer “in the tradition of del Monaco”, and even Fabio Armiliato, who has a totally different type of voice, enjoys when his singing is put down to the “tradition of del Monaco”.⁴ Rodolfo Celletti however, and in spite of his praise for Del Monaco’s “odd electrifying bit of phrasing”, recognized in Del Monaco one of the

¹ Chronologies suggest a much lower amount of performances. He probably sang not more than 220 Otellos.

² According to the website by Giancarlo del Monaco and Roberto Scandurra dedicated to Mario del Monaco: <http://www.mariodelmonaco.net>

³ Selvini, Michele: *Ritratto di Mario del Monaco*; booklet of SRIC 1004. Richard Tucker was given the same title by the same newspaper a few decades later.

⁴ See http://www.fabioarmiliato.com/CDVerdi_reviews.htm

singers who made the “verismo style” popular again during the 1950s. That’s how Celletti defined its characteristics:

“no runs or *messa di voce*; inability to sing legato and to bring the tone down to piano and pianissimo; high notes either throaty or lacking in ring or strident or shouted; in these circumstances the interpretation was bound to be what in fact it was – lacking in observance of the expression marks written in by the composer [...]. Instead, all that was to be heard was bawling, mostly vulgar or hysterical, and singing permanently at a level of forte, or at best at mezzoforte (and that only in the middle of the voice). No ability, obviously, to express the idyllic or pathetic; no elegance; execution of Donizetti and Verdi recitatives and arias with nothing in the eloquence and the tone to differentiate one episode from the next; utter chaos from a stylistic point of view, with no distinction made between Nemorino and the Duke of Mantua, and Turiddu, none between Don Alvaro and Otello, or between Gérard in *Andrea Chénier* and the Count di Luna, none between Renato in *Ballo in Maschera*, Iago and Scarpia, or between the count in *Sonnambula* or Philipp II.”⁵

Admittedly, a comparison of opinions as different as the one of Celletti and Giancarlo del Monaco is polemic – but the fact that characterizations of one and the same singer differ to such a degree, is astonishing. While one side (G. del Monaco, and in a way representing the gros of the fans in Italy and the US) see in Mario del Monaco the greatest Verdi tenor of all times (or, in fact, the “tenor of tenors”), Celletti (a passionate defender of bel canto style and HIP) describes him as a verismo tenor and hence something that is not compatible with the music of Verdi. Magda Olivero went so far to say that Del Monaco was totally unable to sing piano, so that he even failed to portray verismo characters properly. It will be discussed during this article whether his alleged inability to sing piano was a result of a faulty technique or simply the result of what Del Monaco (apparently then along with Celletti) thought was a part of the verismo sound.

Another point of critique is Del Monaco’s upper register. While it is safe to say that Del Monaco possessed a splendid high B-flat and a relatively solid B natural (with a tendency to be flat), his high C was utterly problematic – which (together with the alleged inability to sing piano) raises the question about the flawlessness of his technique and the Melocchi school in general as most of the Melocchians had the same defects as Del Monaco.

Closely linked to the Melocchi technique is also the question of baritonal chest-based singing and its influence on the art of singing in general. While some experience the chesty baritenor-sound as the only really exciting way of tenoral singing (“in the tradition of Fontaine or Tamagno”) and as something necessary for singing heroic Italian repertoire (such as *Norma* or *Otello*), I would rather describe it as a destructive element in the art of singing. Sure enough, Del Monaco was not the only chesty, baritonal voice around during the 1950s and 1960s, and one might ask why this point is raised in an article about Del Monaco. Well, the answer is that Del Monaco was the most famous of all those singers who used his technique or a technique that was similar to it. Like Caruso, Del Monaco was a great star with great influence. He had an immense influence on his fellow singers and on the development of singing.

In short, the following points will be discussed in detail:

- Del Monaco’s problems with technical issues such as dynamic variety and the upper register;
- Del Monaco’s stylistic shortcomings;
- Del Monaco’s influence on the development of singing.

⁵ Celetti, Rodolfo: A history of Belcanto. Oxford 1996, pp. 206 ff.

I. THE HIGH C AND OTHER PROBLEMATIC ISSUES OF DEL MONACO'S TECHNIQUE

The recordings of Mario del Monaco singing a high C are sparse and some of them are doubtful (see below). Here follows a list of the recorded live Cs of Mario del Monaco.

A – LIVE RECORDINGS

Recorded live high Cs (verified recordings)

1. Alone, in an aria or scene: None
2. With a partner, in a duet or scene:
 - 1946, *Ballo in Maschera* (“Teco io sto”) with Carla Castellani
 - 1951, *Ballo in Maschera* (“Teco io sto”) with Elisabetta Barbato
 - 1951, *Manon Lescaut* (act 4) with Clara Petrella
 - 1952, *Ballo in Maschera* (“Teco io sto”) with Herva Nelli
 - 1954, *La Fanciulla del West* (“Io non ti lascio più”) with Eleanor Steber

Recorded live high Cs (doubtful or fake)

1. Alone, in an aria or scene:
 - 1949, *Turandot* (“No no, Principessa”)
 - 1957, *Il Trovatore* (“Di quella pira”)
2. With a partner, in a duet or scene:
 - 1949, *Turandot* with Maria Callas (“Gli enigmi sono tre”)
 - 1951, *Madama Butterfly* (“Bimba dagli occhi”) with Irma Gonzalez

B – STUDIO RECORDINGS

Recorded studio high Cs (verified)

1. Alone, in an aria or scene
 - 1957, *Il Trovatore* (“Di quella pira”)
2. With a partner, in a duet or scene
 - 1954, *Manon Lescaut*, (act 4) with Renata Tebaldi
 - 1955, *Turandot*, (“Gli enigmi sono tre”) with Inge Borkh

Recorded studio high Cs (manipulated)

- 1952, *La Bohème* (“Che gelida manina”), Decca X579
- *Il Trovatore*, “Di quella pira”

Del Monaco sang, according to the chronology by Roberto Scandurra, 1589 performances and bit more than a 100 recitals. The total sum of Del Monaco's performances would be, still according to Scandurra, 1702, while other sources speak of 2000 or more performances. At least 120 of these performances were captured on record. Out of these, only 5 include a high C by Del Monaco, and all of them are with a soprano. There is no live recording of Mario del Monaco singing a high C alone.

The high C in *Manon Lescaut* is an obligatory C which cannot be transposed. The C in *La Fanciulla del West* is part of the score that normally is omitted but was performed by Mitropoulos at the Maggio Musicale in 1954. It was neither repeated in live recording under Votto nor in the studio recording of the same opera under Capuana. Mario del Monaco avoided explicit c-repertoire (repertoire in which the leading tenor has to sing a high C alone, in a scene or aria), and when he sang it, he transposed the Cs (*La Bohème* in Naples, 1950, *Il Trovatore*, RAI, 1957).

The quality of the recorded Cs differs. The one from the 1946 *Ballo* is splendid, and also the one from the 1951 performance in Florence is fine. The C from the 1952 *Ballo* is not as ringing and as dominant as the other two, it is short and effortful. The other two Cs (*Manon Lescaut*, *La Fanciulla del West*) are dominated by the sopranos Petrella and Steber. These documents suggest that Del Monaco was able to launch beautiful ringing high Cs only in the very beginning of his career (between 1945 and 1951). However, it also suggests that Del Monaco did not dare to sing a high C when he had to do it without being paired with a soprano "for backup".

The high Cs from the 1949 performance of *Turandot* with Maria Callas are the result of a forgery. Also, a live version of "Di quella pira" which seems to be sung in the correct key, is a fake: it is the 1957 recording made for the RAI, played a half tone higher. This recording was re-used by Del Monaco in many occasions where he lip-synched to his own, manipulated recording (a short film clip shot at the Arena di Verona and other studio film clips). In the duet from *Butterfly* from Mexico 1951, it is doubtful that Del Monaco sang the high C at all. Both the soprano and Del Monaco go up to the high A and take a breath. In the following C, Del Monaco can't be heard at all. He does not sing the low option. His C was therefore either very weak or non-existent.

Please listen to audio example 01: MADAMA BUTTERFLY, end of act 1 (Del Monaco, Gonzalez, Mexico City 1951)

The 1949 *Turandot*-excerpts have been the subject of a detailed analysis by Callas-specialist Milan Petkovic.⁶ Petkovic furnishes convincing proof that almost the entire recording is a forgery of some live material, but mainly the 1954 (Callas) and 1955 (Del Monaco) studio recordings. That the tenor singing the optional solo high C is not Del Monaco can clearly be heard: the voice spliced in on the high C clearly belongs to another singer. Milan Petkovic:

As soon as Del Monaco enters at "No, no! Gli enigmi sono tre," the acoustic changes. Furthermore, during the only portion to be sung *unisono* by the two protagonists (including their double *fortissimo* high C), *Turandot's* lines can barely be heard, and are totally unrecognisable [sic] as sung by Callas. This section originates from the left channel of the Decca stereophonic recording, in which Mario del Monaco's voice predominates over that of Inge Borkh. A precise comparison between the passage on Decca stereo 1955 (left channel only) and that on the Rodolphe release reveals that the soprano line on the latter is indeed sung by Borkh, not Callas; the sound of the female voice has been deliberately blurred.

⁶ http://www.divinarecords.com/ba_turan.htm

Petkovic furthermore provides an interesting witness statement:

Eduardo Arnosi, a critic of *El mundo* and a close friend of the tenor, was present at three out of four *Turandot* performances of May and June 1949. According to Mr. Arnosi, Del Monaco did not sing the optional high C on any of those occasions. Not only is the acoustic of that portion different from the rest of the Rodolphe excerpt (the drastic change beginning precisely at the word "ardente"), but the timbre of the tenor voice venturing the high C hardly resembles Del Monaco's. It was clearly taken from another source in order make the concocted recording more obviously different from the Decca version (in which Del Monaco does not attempt a high C, but sings the original phrase that includes a lower option and a slightly different text, "ti voglio *tutta* ardente d'amor").

Please listen to audio example 02: TURANDOT, the forgery (Del Monaco, Callas, Buenos Aires 1949)

When such forgery meets people at record companies who are not able to recognize voices, such mistakes happen. I remember the particularly bold case of a mysterious 1937 *Götterdämmerung* from Bayreuth, published by the label Recital Records. It was a forgery where excerpts from a 1928 studio recording with Frida Leider and the 1944 recording of the third act with Max Lorenz were mixed with the background noises of a live recording.

The studio recordings do not have the same significance as live recordings. Recordings are cut and manipulated and single notes can be recorded and re-recorded. The entire Solti-Ring was for instance recorded by Decca in short bits with breaks in between – a method that only major record labels with a great financial fundament can afford. This method was also used in the studio recording of *Il Trovatore* (also for Decca under Erede, 1959): del Monaco's first high C was clearly taken out of another session and mounted. The acoustics and the distance of the voice are significantly different. Another unidentified studio recording of the same aria with manipulated pitch also works a circuit. The unusually bright timbre, a very high tempo and an untypical vibrato give away the trick. The classic Decca recording of "Che gelida manina" (1952) was also issued later with wrong pitch⁷, and not posthumously: Del Monaco lip-synched to this altered version in a 1975 telecast.⁸

In the light of the great amount of manipulations, it is not so strange that listeners with a not too trained ear believe that Mario del Monaco had a great high C. On the other hand, del Monaco has to be blamed for having promoted some of the manipulated recordings as he himself lip-synched to many of those fake high Cs. He must have been aware of his inability to sing the C – otherwise he would not have lip-synched to manipulated recordings. He would have re-recorded the pieces instead. The conclusion can only be that del Monaco had a weak high C. He avoided c-repertoire and, judging from the recorded material, transposed whenever he was confronted with a high C that he would have to sing alone and that could not be manipulated in a studio.⁹ However, the rumor persists that Del Monaco's high C was as solid as some of his other high notes. The assumption is based on nothing, reminding of Josef Schmidt's famous high D that many people enthuse about but that nobody ever has heard.

⁷ The Bongiovanni transfer on GB 1113-2 gives the correct pitch

⁸ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0aBWRmeJTY> – when you read some of the comments under the clip, you can see that many people are easily fooled by the maneuver.

⁹ Some del Monaco fans will now object: del Monaco sang in fact a high C-sharp in the end of act 1 of the RAI-Trovatore. Does a note higher than a high C not mean that del Monaco had command of the high C? No, it does not. Most tenors are able to sing scales that include notes higher than a high C. The challenge is to sing the C inside an aria (where it normally comes after a few minutes of exhausting singing like in *Il Trovatore* ("Di quella pira"), *La Bohème*, *Guillaume Tell* and so on). In the terzetto, the tenor has time to rest and to get ready to fire off a single high note. It is something totally else to sing a difficult aria and crown it with a high C.

The lacking high C was not the only defect in del Monaco's technique. Magda Olivero tells an interesting story about del Monaco and the rehearsals for Zandonai's *Francesca da Rimini*:

"When Del Monaco and I sang *Francesca da Rimini* together at La Scala he explained his whole vocal technique to me. When he finished I said, "My dear Del Monaco, if I had to put into practice all the things you've told me, I'd stop singing right away and just disappear." The technique was so complicated: you push the larynx down, then you push this up, then you do that—in short, it made my head spin just to hear everything he did.



We recorded *Francesca* excerpts together. *Francesca* has a beautiful phrase, "Paolo, datemi pace," marked "piano," and then Paolo enters with "Inghirlandata di violette," which also should be sung softly, delicately. Instead, Del Monaco was terrible—he bellowed the phrase [she imitates him and laughs]! When he listened to the playback he exclaimed, "I can't believe it! After that soft poetic phrase I come in and what do I sound like—a boxer punching with his fists!" He recorded the phrase again, but the second attempt was more or less the same because he was incapable of singing piano. He was furious with himself because he wanted to. He tried everything, but his technique would not permit him to sing softly since it totally was based on the muscles."

The story told by Olivero seems authentic. Mario del Monaco used to carry a tape recorder with him since a 1947 *Trovatore* in Rio de Janeiro where he recorded one of his own performances. Already back then, he was annoyed by the result: "Mamma mia, what a bawler!" he exclaimed about his own performance, throwing up "his arms in disgust".¹⁰ This, however, did not change del Monaco's muscular approach to singing. Del Monaco himself attributed his method to his teacher Melocchi with whom he studied until 1937. According to del Monaco, Melocchi was "the only depositary of true vocal technique"¹¹. When Tullio Serafin advised del Monaco to enter the Opera School of the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome in 1937 to refine his voice (which according to Jens Malte Fischer and others meant to teach del Monaco how to sing piano¹²), the experiment ended in a violent clash with Del Monaco hurling a score at the teacher's head.¹³ From then on, Del Monaco did not see other voice teachers for advice. How "muscular" and violent was Del Monaco's method? He described it himself:

"My method is a very controversial one. For it involves rather violent – if not actually superhuman – muscular exercise of the larynx and palate. But I owe what I am to this method. I have also tried to apply it to others. Beppe Trepiccioni, for instance, did not have a great voice, yet with my coaching he took part in a competition where he met Antonietta Stella who today is his wife."¹⁴

The result of the violent muscular exercise was, as Olivero correctly observed, the inability to sing softly and at the level of piano and pianissimo. This lack can be observed in every recording, at

¹⁰ Nuzzo, Ferruccio: Mario del Monaco; in: *Tenors in Opera*. London 2003, p. 20

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19

¹² Fischer, Jens Malte: *Große Stimmen*. Stuttgart 1995, p. 109

¹³ Nuzzo, p. 20

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

every stage of his career (as far as documented on record), and Del Monaco's successful attempts to sing softly are as rare as recordings of his high C.

The earliest documents of Del Monaco's singing, the 1946 *Ballo in Maschera* from Switzerland, the few excerpts from the 1949 *Turandot*, the complete *Bohème* from Naples (1950), *Butterfly*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Adriana Lecouvreur* and *Aida* from Mexico (1951), *Otello* from Mexico (1950, 1951), *Ballo in Maschera* from Florence (1951) and the studio recordings made between 1948 and 1952 for Decca show an unusual power, great volume and an outstanding metallic quality to the sound, a baritone darkness due to intentional darkening (his "natural" voice was brighter as some of the Decca-recordings from the 1960s prove) and a disproportional employment of chest resonance (*voce di petto*). In the early studio recordings, del Monaco does not always succeed in transporting the metallic quality of the tone to the extreme upper register (B-flat, B natural) which therefore has a slightly dull sound and often slides out of focus. The live recordings exclusively present a singer who uses loud and aggressive singing through and through. There can't be found a single piano note in the entire *Bohème*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Adriana Lecouvreur* and *Butterfly*. Especially the continuously lyrical acts 1 of *Manon Lescaut* and *Madama Butterfly* are taken with a voice that would suit the character of Otello in moments of extreme rage. While Del Monaco seems indefatigable in *Manon Lescaut*, his voice gets throaty and sometimes flat in *Madama Butterfly* when attempting the high notes, and the high C in the duet can't be heard. In *Aida*, where he is involved in an "everything you can sing I can sing louder" competition with all the other leads (Taddei, Callas, Dominguez) and does not attempt to sing softly, he shows signs of vocal fatigue in act 4. The *Otellos* from that period (especially the 1951 recording where he again competes with Taddei) are documents of incredible vocal power.



Due to the excessive forte-singing of the early years, del Monaco's voice became even less flexible, lost the beauty of the timbre and got shorter in range. After the seasons in Mexico City and the excessive forte singing, the only high C ever recorded live again by Mario del Monaco was the short C in the duet from act 2 of *La Fanciulla del West*.¹⁵ He was, as Olivero diagnosed, unable to sing softly already by 1959, when she sang together with del Monaco at La Scala. An *Otello* from Tokyo (1961) shows a vocally tired protagonist with a rough and dull voice and dominated by the Iago of the performance, Tito Gobbi. On his now occasional performances and recitals he avoided repertory with too many high notes. In a 1966 program in Berlin (del Monaco was 51 years old), he sang 6 arias in total which included only two high B-flats (in "Ch'ella mi creda"), and of which one was a baritone aria ("Largo al factotum"). He also unavailingly attempted to establish himself as a heldentenor in Germany where he appeared as Siegmund in *Die Walküre* (Stuttgart 1966) – a part that does not go higher than A and requires a lyrical touch that del Monaco did not have. Instead, he tried to rival the length of Melchior's infamous "Wälse"-cries in act 1. His last public appearance was for French TV in 1976 where he demonstrated a still metallic but tinny and rough voice, able to go up to a solid high A of great ring but devoid of any kind of flexibility and subtlety. He also made recordings with pop-music producer and composer Detto Mariano who arranged some Neapolitan songs for del Monaco (CLS label).

¹⁵ I do not count the short high C in *Otello* on "quella vil cortigiana", which is declaimed and in many cases, not on a C.

Summary: del Monaco used a technique that was based on the Melocchi method, i.e. “violent muscular exercise” (del Monaco) to pull down the larynx and to achieve an open, chesty and dark sound that del Monaco used to pull up to the high register. Successful in the beginning, the high register thinned out after he started to sing *Aida* and *Otello* up to total vocal exhaustion in Mexico City. His voice became rough and tinny, and the vocal range shortened. He was totally unable to sing piano and pianissimo, and by the age of 50, unable to compete with other Italian tenors in the Italian repertoire, he tried to establish himself as a heldentenor in a repertoire that was devoid of high notes (Siegfried, Lohengrin). His only cavallo di battaglia remained the role of Otello which he sang until 1972.

II. “VERISMO STYLE”

Mario del Monaco could only in exceptional cases sing at a level of piano or pianissimo: his technique usually only allowed dynamics between mezzo forte and forte fortissimo. Del Monaco was not able to sing *messa di voce* and usually ignored the expression marks in the score. His sound was round and powerful as long as there was no high C to sing and as long as the voice was not overstressed. A powerful, balanced, dark and round sound is normally seen as an ideal condition for singing Verdi, and Del Monaco was hence seen as one of the best Verdi tenors of the century. This is certainly an error.

Verdi did not enjoy stentorian singing, and ever since 1870 (at the latest), when he got under the influence of Wagner, he repeatedly uttered his desire for more expression in singing, even if that meant to produce ugly sounds. Since Otello was Del Monaco’s greatest role and since criticizing him in this particular role almost seems uncalled for, it is particularly interesting to read how Verdi wanted his Otello to sound. In certain moments of the score, Verdi wanted Otello to sing with half voice (“a mezza voce”):

“And that is something that Tamagno does not know how to do. He always has to sing with full voice, without that his sound gets a little off, ugly or shaky....That’s something really serious that makes me think a lot! I’d rather not publish my work if I can’t have this particular scene [Niun mi tema] the way I want it.”¹⁶

If Verdi already was concerned about Tamagno, how would he have thought of Mario del Monaco? Del Monaco consequently ignored all dynamic and expression marks written by Verdi in the score of *Otello*. A quick analysis of the first act of the 1951 version from Mexico may suffice as representative example. In the “Esultate”, he inserts an A-flat before the B on “urugano” in order to facilitate the attack (to be fair, del Monaco is not the only one who did that, but Verdi did not write it). Del Monaco applies so much brute force that the voice always is on the verge to slide out of focus. All notes are sung forte fortissimo (Verdi wrote forte) with mainly chest voice.

Please listen to audio example 03: *OTELLO, Esultate (Del Monaco, Mexico City 1951)*

While loud and aggressive singing might still be acceptable (or even required) for the “Esultate”, the love duet is started in forte as well, even though Verdi clearly wrote piano (see fig.1).

¹⁶ Busch, Hans (Ed.): Verdi-Briefe. Frankfurt a.M. 1979, p. 174

Already on “s’amansa”, the voice has developed a real fortissimo, and the following “tuoni”, where Verdi wrote forte, is just as loud. The accent on “tuoni” is ruined because del Monaco has already been at the level of fortissimo before. “Se dopo l’ira” is still forte and sounds threatening even though it is supposed to be “dolce”. The crescendo on “immensa” develops therefore into fortissimo. Del Monaco tries to insert a diminuendo and manages to bring the G-flat down to forte. The following “vien quest’immenso amor!” is written in piano pianissimo (ppp) and morendo (which means that the sound has to fade out) – del Monaco sings fortissimo. His partner, Clara Petrella, joins del Monaco in the sempre-forte style, and at the latest when the violas and violins are playing legato and pianissimo on “Oh come è dolce”, the discrepancy between the bellowing singers and the musicians in the pit (who play what is written) becomes more than obvious. Del Monaco’s reply, beginning with “Pingea dell’armi” is first accentuated nicely, but then seems to get out of control. Del Monaco starts declaiming where he is supposed to sing and hence produces notes that are not written in the score. The attack on “stral” is totally overdone and sounds like a fit of jealousy.

Fig. 1 Poco più. (♩ = 72.)
Otello

Già nel-la not-te den-sa s'e-stin-gue ogni cla-mor, già il mio cor fre-me-bon-do s'am-

pp legatissimo

Vc. Tutti i Violoncelli con sordine divisi a 4

pp

O. -mansa in quest'am-plex-so e si rin-sen-sa. Tuo-ni la guer-ra e si-na-bis-si il mondo

dim.

Vc.

Desdemona **SS** *dolce*

Mio su-per-boguer-rier! quan-ti tor-

O. *dolce* *ppp* *morendo*

se do-po l'ira im-men-sa vien quest'im-men-so a-mor!

The list could be continued ad infinitum. When Otello is supposed to hit a high A dolce and piano, del Monaco sings forte fortissimo (“E tu m’amavi”). The end (see fig.2), it is almost unnecessary to say, is written in ppp, with harp, violins and woodwinds in the accompaniment to illustrate the calm night and, of course, to contrast the rough beginning of the opera – the storm is over. To that background, del Monaco is hammering the words “Già le pleiade” in steely fortissimo and bellows his “Venere splende”. Petrella joins him, of course not in pp as Verdi wrote – but what choice did she have. The end of act one sounds like the end of *Andrea Chénier* (we remember Celletti’s words). And that’s how the rest of the recording sounds as well. When del Monaco finally meets Giuseppe Taddei (Iago) who had a voice of the size to compete with del Monaco, no holds are barred. The opera turns into a genuine shouting contest. The end (“Niun mi tema”) is stentorian and full of exaggerated vocal histrionics. Fischer rightly pointed out that del Monaco did not know how to be dramatic without sobbing and bellowing:

“Listening to Pertile, del Monaco could have learned that you can still be a dramatic singer without singing at full voice all the time – if you make use of all your dynamic colors.”¹⁷

Please listen to audio example 04: *OTELLO*, *Già le pleiade ardente* (Del Monaco, Petrella, Mexico City 1951)

Fig. 2

The musical score for Figure 2 is from Giuseppe Verdi's *Otello*, Act 1, Scene 1, "Già le pleiade ardente". It features the following parts and markings:

- Arpa:** Accompaniment with dynamics *ppp* and *mf*.
- O. (Otello):** Main vocal line with lyrics "an-co-ra un ba - - cio. (alzandosi e mirando il cielo) Già la ple-i-ade ar-dente in mar di-". Dynamics include *ppp* and *mf*.
- Viol. (Violins):** Accompaniment with dynamics *ppp* and *morendo*.
- V-le (Viola):** Accompaniment with dynamics *ppp* and *morendo*.
- Vc. (Violoncello):** Accompaniment with dynamics *ppp* and *morendo*.
- Cb. (Contrabasso):** Accompaniment with dynamics *pp* and *morendo*.

The score includes tempo markings such as "Poco più lento. (♩ : 80)" and "dolceissimo".

The *Otello* from Mexico could be an exception, but it is not.

Whenever del Monaco sang the role of Radamès, he skipped all the dynamic notations by the composer and simply sang forte, fortissimo or forte fortissimo – in “Celeste Aida” (which is a dreamy piece and again has strings in pianissimo to accompany him), in the duet with Aida (“Il ciel dei nostri amori” is supposed to be dolce) and of course in the final duet. The critic Piotr Kaminski also noticed a problem resulting from del Monaco’s intentional darkening of the voice. He wrote about the 1952 studio version:

“Del Monaco s’étrangle d’emblée sur les Fa de l’air (l’héroïne s’appelle soudain... Aïdo), pour trompeter ensuite à ça façon, surtout n’importe comment.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Fischer, p. 357

¹⁸ Kaminski, Piotr: *Aida: Discographie*; in: *L’avant scène opera* nr. 4. Paris 2001, p.119

All other live recordings have similar defects. In every single recording of *Ballo in maschera*, *La Forza del destino*, *Il Trovatore* (“un ‘Deserto sulla terra’ scandaleux de médiocrité, faux, pas en mesure” [Jean Cabourg])¹⁹, *Otello* and *Aida*, del Monaco ignores the composer’s notations and obstinately sings forte or fortissimo. He ignores all the lyrical moments all Verdi characters have more or less, especially Manrico and Radamès. Del Monaco was probably aware of his mistakes when he decided to blame the ignoring of musical notations, excessive forte singing and the over-the-top stretching of high notes on the competitiveness of Maria Callas: “I noticed that Maria was holding the high notes longer than necessary, and I knew that the competition had started.”²⁰ The recordings, on the other hand, show that del Monaco also was loud when Maria Callas was not around. The worst role portrayal of all Verdi characters made by del Monaco was, however, the Duca di Mantova in *Rigoletto* (with Erede for Decca, 1954). Del Monaco, devoid of any kind of subtleness, elegance and flexibility sings a Duke who sounds like a light version of Otello, sempre forte, wooden, brutal and uninspired.

Please listen to audio example 05: *RIGOLETTO*, *La donna è mobile* (excerpt, studio recording)

In view of these shortcomings, it is not comprehensible how one can call del Monaco a great Verdi tenor. Verdi would probably not have approved of his singing – and he would probably have disliked his Otello as well. It is true that the Italian tradition of performing is different from the German or French which have a much older orchestral culture than the Italians and hence a different approach when it comes to how true one has to be to the score. A score of a Beethoven symphony or a piece by Berlioz must not be changed. Operas were more or less treated likewise.²¹ The Italians had a different musical history and another history of performing. Operas were not performed with the same fidelity, and the musicians, especially the singers had more freedom to edit the music for effect purposes. This, however, changed with the Wagnerian influence. Verdi wanted to hear what he had written (which is also why he explicitly wrote the cadenzas for instance in *Rigoletto*). Toscanini subsequently started to perform works with the greatest possible fidelity – a musical revolution for Italy. Verdi can therefore not be performed with the freedom the singers took when they were performing bel canto operas during the 19th century. Del Monaco, however, ignored practically everything Verdi wrote and just impressed by the ability to go through a Verdi score at the constant volume of forte without losing the voice. That is certainly something, but it does not make him a great Verdi singer and, after all, certainly not the “Otello of the century”. Many prominent critics preferred the Otello of Ramón Vinay (Fischer) or Giovanni Martinelli (Blyth). Even Rudolf Bing preferred Vinay.²² Scandurra, however, has nothing but praise for del Monaco’s Verdi interpretations (*and his top register*):

“Mario Del Monaco has been a Verdian tenor par excellence. His interpretations in the operas by Giuseppe Verdi found maximum congeniality, which, beyond his colour of a bronzean voice, was due to robust centres, outstanding and ringing top notes, in short, a true ‘body’ of a full voice suited to

¹⁹ Cabourg, Jean: *Le Trouvère: Discographie*; in: *L’avant scène opera* nr. 60. Paris 1984, p. 111

²⁰ Del Monaco in his autobiography, quoted in Selvini, p.8; for recorded “competitions” between del Monaco and Callas, listen to *Aida* (Mexico 1951), *Andrea Chénier* (Milan 1955) or the excerpts of *Turandot* (Buenos Aires 1949).

²¹ This led to the interesting phenomenon that some singers of the Germanic school and musical education recorded versions of Italian arias in German which are musically much closer to the original notation than any other Italian recording. Cf. Helge Rosvaenge’s “Celeste Aida” from 1938 with a beautiful pianissimo high B-flat in the end, Lauritz Melchior’s Otello monologues or Gerhard Hüsch’s version of “Il balen del suo sorriso”.

²² Bing, Rudolf: *5000 Abende in der Oper* [5000 nights at the opera]. München 1973, p. 156

many roles in Verdi. Ernani, Riccardo, Manrico, Radames, Alvaro and finally Otello have found the ideal interpreter in him.”²³

The shortcomings described above were summarized by Celletti with the term “verismo style”. For Celletti, verismo style was not only stentorian singing, vocal histrionics and a rather slacky handling of the composer’s notations – for Celletti it also means the total inability to change the color of the voice and hence to portray an operatic character properly:

No ability, obviously, to express the idyllic or pathetic; no elegance; execution of Donizetti and Verdi recitatives and arias with nothing in the eloquence and the tone to differentiate one episode from the next; utter chaos from a stylistic point of view, with no distinction made between Nemorino and the Duke of Mantua, and Turiddu, none between Don Alvaro and Otello, or between Gérard in *Andrea Chénier* and the Count di Luna, none between Renato in *Ballo in Maschera*, Iago and Scarpia, or between the count in *Sonnambula* or Philipp II.”

How did del Monaco cope with verismo repertory and the other operatic literature written between 1890 and 1925?²⁴ The French critic Jean Cabourg dubbed del Monaco not without sarcasm “le symbol d’un certain vérisme”²⁵, and we shall come back to this comment a bit later. For *Cavalleria Rusticana*, del Monaco might for instance not have been a bad choice (studio 1953, 1960, 1967), if it wasn’t for his monotonous and monochrome presentation that turns the character of Turiddu into a superficial caricature. Jean Cabourg:

“Une grande voix certes, homogène mais monocorde, pesante, forcée. Passe encore pour Canio mais ici la methode du chant ‘sui generis’ montre cruellement ses limites. La meilleure prestation [the one from 1953] tout de même d’un del Monaco qui en 1960 [with Serafin, Decca] aura décliné, moins cependant qu’en 1967 [with Varviso, Decca] où il est affligé.”²⁶

Del Monaco’s Turiddu is always loud, brutal and aggressive and the voice devoid of any nuance. The color, the hue always remains the same. His Canio in *Pagliacci* was similar, even though, as Cabourg pointed out, not as disturbing in a simple opera like *Pagliacci*. But sometimes, del Monaco also sang the prologue – a baritone aria for which del Monaco was lacking the body of the low register. It is particularly annoying when, as it was the case in a 1957 performance in Naples, del Monaco delivered a mediocre prologue while the Tonio of the evening, the excellent Afro Poli, had no chance to shine.

Another opera del Monaco used to sing was Cilea’s *Adriana Lecouvreur* (live Mexico 1951, studio 1962). Listening to the Mexico version, it is incomprehensible that he was chosen for the role of Maurizio. The aria “L’anima ho stanca” is sung within a dynamic range of forte and fortissimo. The 1:53 minutes are packed with sobbing and histrionics. None of that is written in the score – on the contrary: Cilea wrote p “a mezza voce” in the beginning, then pp and diminuendo. The only loud note is written on “ma se amor”. “La dolcissima effigie” is a similar fiasco and Del Monaco for *Adriana Lecouvreur* a clear miscast.

Similar things are to say about *Andrea Chénier*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, *La Bohème* and especially *Manon Lescaut* – operas in which Del Monaco appeared frequently and which he recorded commercially (except for *La Bohème*). They are all sung with the same chesty, sometimes unfocussed, loud, undifferentiated approach, filled with histrionics and other vulgarities. The tone simply does not fit a poet (Chénier) or a painter (Cavaradossi), it does not fit the tender music for *Butterfly* and the light atmosphere of *La Bohème* (act 3 which is more dramatic, is overdone and sounds like *Otello*).

²³ See http://www.mariodelmonaco.net/lang1/tenore_verdiano.html [15.XII.2009]

²⁴ A distinction has to be made between verismo and most Puccini works which certainly are not verismo. Only Edgar and maybe Le Villi could pass as verismo. *Andréa Chénier* is a historical drama, not verismo.

²⁵ Cabourg, Jean: *Cavalleria Rusticana*; in: *L’avant scène opera*, nr. 50. Paris 1983, p. 131

²⁶ Ibid.

When Del Monaco sang Des Grieux, the romantic, love sick Puccinian fool, he turned the opera into an orgy of shouting. And that is probably the certain verismo that Jean Cabourg was talking about: that certain verismo that nobody really wants to listen to.

When Celletti calls this style of singing “verismo style”, he does great injustice to the post-verdian music theatre. Not everything that is verismo is loud and vulgar and not everything composed by other composers than Verdi past 1890 is verismo. The truth is that del Monaco’s style is not compatible with most musical works. Loud, stentorian singing has nothing to do with established operatic styles. It is the personal style of Mario del Monaco and a side effect of the singing technique that he used. His style was a style that puts the singer and his vocal show in the centre of the entire happening. Del Monaco was an incredible one man show, a great entertainer, but not a great artist. No wonder that his only attempt to appear as a Wagnerian tenor (Stuttgart 1966) was a fiasco that was never repeated.

Please listen to audio example 06: ADRIANA LECOUVREUR, L'anima ho stanca (Mexico 1951)

Please listen to audio example 07: MANON LESCAUT, Guardate, pazzo son (Mexico 1951)

III. COPYING DEL MONACO

“Did Melocchi teach him to sing this way? **Absolutely and categorically not!** First of all as can be seen in Del Monaco’s 1940 recordings, he didn’t always sing this way. The often choppy legato, the held breath in word pauses with the pressurization and explosiveness consequent in his *fraseggio*, typical of his singing from the mid 50s onward; the exaggeration in reaching extremes in vocalism, etc., were all Del Monaco’s doing, not Melocchi’s instruction. No doubt, Melocchi could give a tenor the tools necessary to achieve Del Monaco’s type of vocalism, but he didn’t push his singers to take these artistic exaggerations on in their singing, though many did in order to imitate Del Monaco, their idol. [...]The fact that many Melocchi tenors [...] sounded often like Del Monaco in their actual way of expressing and of producing phrases, has more to do with a cultish adoration of Del Monaco’s aesthetics rather than with Melocchi’s instructions.” G. Lauro LiVigni²⁷

This quote has two main conclusions of which one seems right (del Monaco was an idol to many who tried to copy his style) while the other one (del Monaco’s style has nothing to do with Melocchi) seems rather doubtful. Melocchi’s method led *exactly* to the singing we know by Mario del Monaco, and it is a strange fact that a voice expert like LiVigni tries to convince his readers of the opposite. The Melocchi method had its fundament in the deliberate lowering of the larynx which is contrary to most other Italian singing schools where a lowering of the larynx is not an issue and where the lowering is a welcome side effect of “opening” the voice.

The result of lowering the larynx with force is a hoarse sound. The Melocchi method then tries to make the voice sound on the hoarse point by applying violent exercises (glottal attacks) to teach the vocal apparatus to produce sound in this unnatural position. This process normally takes a long time, and the result is a robust and dark but thick voice that sits in the throat and the chest.²⁸ The idea of *voix mixte*, mask singing and projection were rejected by Melocchi – they are not compatible with a violently lowered larynx. The kind of voice produced by Melocchi is not able to sing softly, piano and

²⁷ Tenor Gioacchino Lauro LiVigni in his apologetic article on the Melocchi method, see http://www.grandi-tenori.com/articles/articles_livigni_melocchi.php

²⁸ Please listen to the recording of a Melocchi lesson that can be found on this site.

pianissimo, cause the apparatus was trained with force and applies brutal muscular power to produce sound. Looking at del Monaco and Gastone Limarilli – two Melocchians who were captured live on video – it is obvious that the entire body is involved in contracting action every time before a big sound is launched (Del Monaco involves upper arms, the neck and especially the shoulders which are lift and then, at the same moment as the vocal attack, dropped violently). Soft sound and piano is achieved by a free and relaxed voice, not by a rough, stiff and hard one. Del Monaco therefore had no choice after he acknowledged Melocchi as “the only depositary of true vocal technique”, and del Monaco’s style is therefore linked to the technique he used.

The thick sound, the preponderance of chest sound as a result of the lowered larynx and the lack of falsetto require an enormous amount of power in order to sing in the upper register. The result normally is a worn voice and a weak upper register unless you possess unusually strong physical conditions. All Melocchians had thick voices and problems with the high C. Limarilli was often unable to sing a decent B, and even a B-flat could cause him trouble (listen for example to *La Fanciulla del West* from Trieste, 1965). Limarilli’s voice thinned out in the upper register, got flat and sounded worn. Gianfranco Cecchele, another Melocchian, had similar problems. His voice often sounded chesty, loud and dry. Neither Cecchele nor Limarilli seemed to have had the same physical requisites as del Monaco who must have possessed very resilient vocal chords in order to make a great career with the Melocchi method.

The sound of Limarilli and Cecchele was similar to del Monaco’s *due* to the technique they shared, and it is right when LiVigni speaks about them (and unfortunately many others) imitating the “artistic exaggerations” of del Monaco who was “their idol”. Del Monaco was a great star and continuously promoted by Decca records. Impressed by the power of the singing, many others uncritically wanted to be like him, forgetting that del Monaco probably had unusually resilient vocal material. The results were disastrous. Nobody could sound like del Monaco, no other Melocchian came even remotely close to the power of someone who was an exception. It is painful to observe when tenors who do not at all possess the same physical conditions as del Monaco try to sound like him and to copy the “artistic exaggerations” that were so closely linked to the technique and personal abilities of del Monaco. All imitators became nothing more but caricatures and del Monaco-epigones who either delivered unattractive singing or destroyed their voices prematurely.

Del Monaco had an enormous impact on how many characterize dramatic singing, Verdi- and verismo-singing. A singer who attempts the role of Otello is expected to have a loud and dark voice like del Monaco (think of Atlantov, Galuzin), capable of delivering fireworks in forte singing. To many, a tenor with a bright voice is not suited for Otello, even though Tamagno, the creator of the role, had a bright timbre. The consequence was that, during and after del Monaco’s reign as “Otello assoluto”, many singers sang Otello with artificially darkened voices, chesty and with unsatisfying acuti. Carlo Curami, an Italian critic, observed exactly that phenomenon in Italy in 1992:

“La voce del moro di Venezia [è] troppo spesso preda di tenori baritonali privi di smalto e di lucentezza sugli acuti.”²⁹

Dramatic tenors in general are expected to have del Monaco-like qualities – and that might be a reason for why there are so few of them around today. In Verdi’s days, dramatic parts were only rarely sung by baritenors, and even in Puccini’s time, there weren’t many of them. Francesco Merli, one of the heaviest voices in Italy during the 1930s did not have a voice as dark and chesty as Del Monaco. Aureliano Pertile, leading dramatic tenor in the 1930s and 1940s did not have such a voice at all. Giovanni Martinelli and Giacomo Lauri Volpi had (just as Merli and Pertile) long careers and were celebrated Otellos, in Italy and abroad. Lauritz Melchior, who made some of the best recordings of the

²⁹ Curami in a review of a recital disc of Mario Filippeschi, in: *Musica* nr. 3, 1992

Otello-monologues, had an excellent projection and an extraordinarily well focused voice. Mario Filippeschi had a voice with very dark undertones but sang, similar to Melchior and the others named before, with an ideal mix of chest and head voice, through a funnel that produced exceptionally focused and well projected sounds. They never showed any signs of wear or fatigue, possessed a wide dynamic range (listen to Melchior's Otello monologues and Filippeschi's Duca di Mantova) and no problems with the highest register.

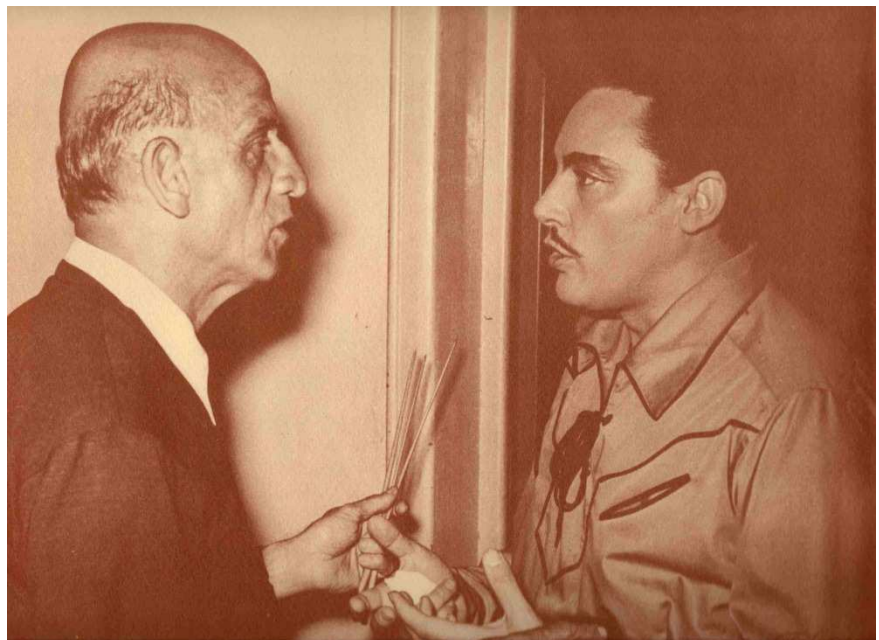
Melocchi and del Monaco had no idea of these alternatives. Instead of focused, healthy mixed sound, the chest voice was exploited to deliver a loud, broad sound carpet. That kind of singing is destructive for anyone attempting it unless, del Monaco said so himself, one is "superhuman". Why so many still see del Monaco as an idol is an enigma to me. Why some singers think that his style is worth imitating – a mystery. Del Monaco had an unbelievable voice one can gaze at, unique in the history of singing. But he had nothing one should copy.

IV. EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE

Mario del Monaco also made recordings which are *not* dominated by either shouting, ignoring the score or competing with the rest of the cast. There are a few recordings where the actually beautiful timbre of his voice gets a chance to shine and where, apparently, severe conductors did not allow the singers to exaggerate – the exception to the rule. Most of these recordings are studio recordings as del Monaco mostly "lost control" in the heat of a live performance. The only live recording of a complete opera I would like to mention here is:

- *La fanciulla del West*, with Steber, Guelfi, Mitropoulos, Maggio Musical Fiorentino 1954

This *Fanciulla* is one of the best live recordings of this opera money can buy. Del Monaco does not showcase his thick, chesty sound in exaggerated contests with his colleagues – he sings in beautiful legato lines, the high notes are all there and they are, first of all, perfect in length and without effort and he does some fine vocal acting without his typical exaggerations. The responsible for this "tame" version of Del



Monaco are probably the high artistic expectations of conductor Dmitri Mitropoulos.³⁰ Here is an excerpt of Sandro Cometta's review of this recording, regarding the singing of del Monaco:

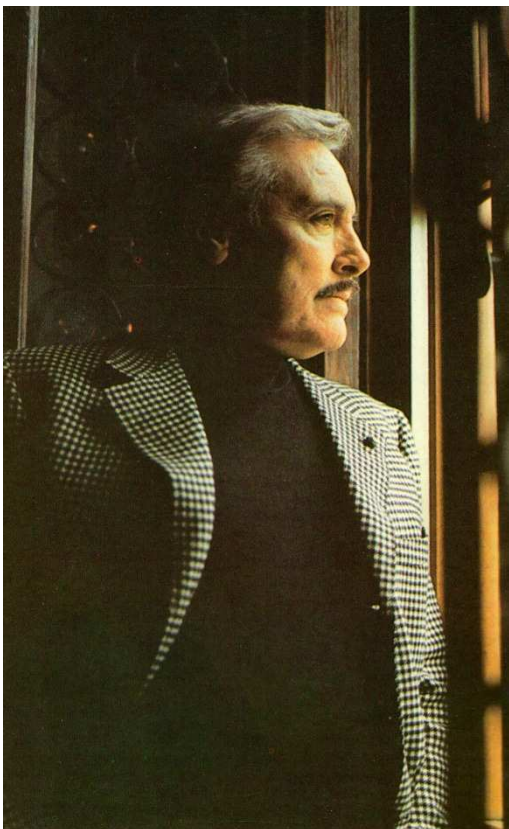
³⁰ This assumption could be wrong as there also are recordings of del Monaco and Mitropoulos where del Monaco is at his normal level; cf. *La Forza del destino* from 1953 and recordings of single arias, such as "Largo al factotum" from 1959.

“Elle [Minnie, Eleanor Steber] fait tout pour l’avoir, son bandit, un Mario del Monaco par moments trop «noble » mais toujours très viril, qui réussit une des meilleurs incarnations de cette canaille : son « Risparmiare lo scherno » est superbe de ton.”³¹

Interesting are also some late *Otellos* (1970-1972) – simply because del Monaco did not possess the same vocal power as he did during the 1950s. In these late recordings, del Monaco replaces the shouting with a more subtle reading of the text, more acting, more declaiming. Thus, he puts more theatre into an opera which actually is rather a piece of *Musikdrama* than a real Italian opera. The result is that his *Otello* gains in depth and credibility: less show and more contents. A concert with orchestral accompaniment from Berlin (1961) also shows some very nice singing. Some parts seem to have been recorded on video (if not the entire concert): the recordings of “Addio fiorito asil” and “Giulietta son io” from Zandonai’s *Giulietta e Romeo* are really well done. No shouting, no exaggerations, great legato and very much “in character” without being vulgar.

The studio recordings I would like to mention are the following:

- Some of the late Decca-recordings (arias and songs)
- *Turandot*, with Borkh, Tebaldi, Erede, Decca 1955



Between 1948 and 1969, del Monaco recorded several arias in the Decca studios, and most of the recordings have been re-issued by the Testament label (recordings 1948-1952) and Decca itself in an interesting set of all studio recordings, del Monaco had made for Decca between 1948 and 1969. The earliest recordings (with Quadri, 1948) show del Monaco before his first *Otello* début in 1950. The voice is slightly better focused and not as thick as it was afterwards. Especially an Italian versions of “In fernem Land” and “O paradis” might be worth mentioning. The beginning of the aria from *L’Africaine* is to only convincing attempt by del Monaco to sing truly softly and lyrically. A “Nessun dorma” from the same session is, however, sung with brute force. The recordings made in 1951 and 1952 are all sung with the well known *Otello*-sound, devoid of nuance and stentorian. Especially bad are some excerpts from *Martha*, *Werther* and *Andrea Chénier* where the voice is not only too thick, too loud and, the reader may forgive me this expression, proletarian – also the bad side effects of the darkening can be heard clearly: the vowels are muffled, and in every high note is an unpleasant /u/ or /ö/ sound.

Some of the late studio recordings show del Monaco in another extreme. When he tried to change his vocal technique due to a vocal crisis in the early 1960s, he recorded a few arias with a much lighter approach (with Carlo Franci). The timbre is freed of the artificial darkening; the voice sounds fresh and agile, and even something that reminds of tender sound seemed to have come into reach. The recording of “Testa adorata” is superior to the one made in 1951, and even the recordings of arias taken from repertory that seems to be too light for del Monaco, are fine: “È la solita storia del pastore” from *L’Arlesiana* and “Firenze è come un albero fiorito” from *Gianni Schicchi*. The recordings of the two scenes from Mascagni’s *Isabeau* are truly exceptional: here is a spinto tenor with

³¹ Cometta, Sandro: *La Fanciulla del West*, discographie; in: *L’avant scène opéra* nr. 165, 1995, p. 119

a voice of the true Italian tradition, bright, powerful, and elegant. I would go so far to call these recordings the best of these particular two arias: del Monaco sounds younger and more passionate than Gigli (who recorded them in 1940) and has a much more pleasant voice than Bernardo de Muro, Carlo Ballin or Carmelo Alabiso, whose distinctive timbre is certainly not everybody's cup of tea. Unfortunately, del Monaco went back to the old style only a few years after.

A recording in which del Monaco's beautiful timbre is particularly well captured, is the complete recording of *Turandot* with Inge Borkh as Turandot and Renata Tebaldi as Liù. In this recording, the sound engineers have blended del Monaco's voice well into the orchestral sound, and he is not as dominant as in many other recordings. Electronic manipulations perhaps – but the result is nice to listen to (As Daniele Rubboli tells, the 1967 with Anna Moffo and Daniele Barioni was made in a similar way: to make Barioni's voice less dominant, he had to stand away from the microphone, and sound engineers fixed the results afterwards. But the result was excellent, and at least on record, Moffo and Barioni were a really nice pairing [RCA]). Still, French critic Jean-Louis Dutronc rightly complains about the lack of nuance in del Monaco's interpretation of Calaf:

“Le Calaf de Mario del Monaco, « tubant » sans cesse, chantent pesamment à 120% de ses moyens, sans nuance, sans noblesse, mais ne parvenant pas malgré tout à ternir l'un des plus beaux timbres du monde.”³²

As right as Dutronc might be, Calaf is, on the other hand, not a much nuanced character either. He gets enchanted by the vision of Turandot in act one, and from that point on, he is only interested in winning the princess – at any cost. While Jussi Björling (1959) clearly went over his limits and Giuseppe di Stefano (1961) seemed emotionally much too involved for a cold character like Calaf, while Franco Corelli's recording (1966) was full of musical mistakes and overflowing with the ego of the tenor, while José Carreras and Luciano Pavarotti clearly did not have the voice for Calaf and Eugenio Fernandi was a rather pale choice for the 1954 recording with Callas, del Monaco is, at least to my taste and at least in this particular recording, an almost ideal Calaf and joins Francesco Merli and Giovanni Martinelli in the Olympus of the greatest Calafs on record.

Listening to the records mentioned above, I wish that del Monaco had sung more with less voice, brighter and more like the spinto that he probably really was – and less as the baritenor, the one-man-tempest he is on most of his records. Even if he was far from being a versatile and elegant singer and even if he did not have a technique one should imitate – the “tame”, “cultured” del Monaco was certainly an exceptional singer with a voice of unique quality. It is such a great pity – and to conclude, I can only repeat this phrase – that he did so much of the del-Monaco-show and so little of the great singing he definitely was capable of. ###

Please listen to audio example 08: ISABEAU, Tu ch'odi lo mio grido (studio, with C. Franci)

Please listen to audio example 09: GIULIETTA E ROMEO, Giulietta son' io (Berlin 1961)

Please listen to audio example 10: MADAMA BUTTERFLY, Addio fiorito asil (Berlin 1961)

³² Dutronc, Jean-Louis: *Turandot*, discographie; in: *L'avant scène opéra* nr. 33, 1981, p. 109



©Daniele Godor, François Nouvion 2009