

Chaplin songs are re-released

Review by David Ware

1973 marked the centenary of legendary singer Enrico Caruso and composer Sergei Rachmaninoff, and featured many commemorative releases and accolades, mostly deserved.

However, a third Centenary passed by almost un-noticed, that of Russian bass Feodor Chaliapin.

In his own day, Chaliapin was as celebrated and lionized as his good friend Caruso. Today, his is almost an unknown figure. Until recently, the only widely circulated recordings of Chaliapin were two released by Angel in the mid 60s, one devoted to operatic performances, the other to art and concert songs.

Both have been re-released by Angel on their Seraphim cut-price line. Unfortunately, Angel has seen fit to leave the translations and transcriptions of the lyrics that accompanied the records on their first release out of the Seraphim discs.

Happily, though belatedly, there is a new two-record set of Chaliapin on the

market, released this year by Odeon Records. With source material ranging back to 1910, the sonics of Feodor Chaliapin: Aries and Songs are usually not up to the standards of the more recent Angel/Seraphim discs, but in exchange, most of the material is fresh issue, with many cuts seeing the light of day for the first time since the recording sessions.

Chaliapin's idiosyncratic approach towards his material is in much stronger evidence on the new Odeon release than on the Angel discs. Possibly influenced by his difficulty in maintaining a melodic line with any degree of grace, Chaliapin instead opted for an actor's approach in performance, which unfortunately comes off badly on record. His recorded performances are replete with mysterious pauses, slack phrasing, a bit of shouting here and there and, when in Italian, a poor command of the language.

Odeon includes several excerpts from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, probably the role that Chaliapin felt most comfortable with. Presented are four scenes: The Coronation scene, from a 1925 studio production, the Monologue ("I have achieved the highest power"), the Clock scene and Boris' farewell and death, from a performance at London's Covent Garden in 1928.

Also from the 1928 London season are several excerpts from Gounod's *Faust* memorable only for difficulties with the tempo, sparked by a public quarrel between Chaliapin and the conductor.

Chaliapin's public recitals were trying experiences for any accompanist, as he would choose his songs as he went along, expecting the accompanist to be on top of every arrangement.

Of necessity, then, his recitals were something of a mixed bag, and the recital pieces included in the Odeon set are no different. Some are impressive, some have moments of greatness, but all too much of the material is variable-quality disaster, with muffled lines, bad timing, and surprisingly enough, since the songs are all in Russian, simple misintonation.

All in all, this record set is somewhat disappointing, since there certainly must be better recordings of Chaliapin. But as a monument to and document of one of the most influential singers of the century, it demands attention.

hot town tonight

Cinema 1: *Billy Jack*, 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30 p.m.
 Cinema 2: *Frankenstein*, 1:30, 3:08, 4:46, 6:24, 8:02, 9:40 p.m.
 Cooper Lincoln: *The White Dawn*, 7, 9:15 p.m.
 Douglas 1: *Doctor Zhivago*, 1:30, 4:30, 8:10 p.m.
 Douglas 2: *The Sting*, 2, 4:55, 7:09, 9:20 p.m.
 Douglas 3: *Born Losers*, 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30 p.m.
 84th & O: *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, 8:05 p.m.; *The Heartbreak Kid*, 9:55 p.m.
 Embassy: *The Debauchers*, 11 a.m.; 12:30, 2, 3:30, 5, 6:30, 8, 9:30 p.m.
 Hollywood and Vine 1: *The Best of the New York Erotic Film Festival*, 1:30, 3:30, 7:30, 9:30 p.m.
 Hollywood and Vine 2: *Oh! Calcutta!*, 1:30, 3:30, 7:30, 9:30 p.m.
 Joyo: *Claudine*, 7, 8:40 p.m.
 Plaza 1: *Death Wish*, 2, 4, 5:45, 7:30, 9:15 p.m.
 Plaza 2: *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, 2:30, 4:45, 7, 9:15 p.m.
 Plaza 3: *Chinatown*, 2:30, 4:45, 7, 9:30 p.m.
 Plaza 4: *California Split*, 1:45, 3:45, 5:45, 7:45, 9:45 p.m.
 Starview: *Macon County Line*, 8 p.m.; *Boxcar Bertha*, 9:45 p.m.
 State: *Three the Hard Way*, 1, 2:36.

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