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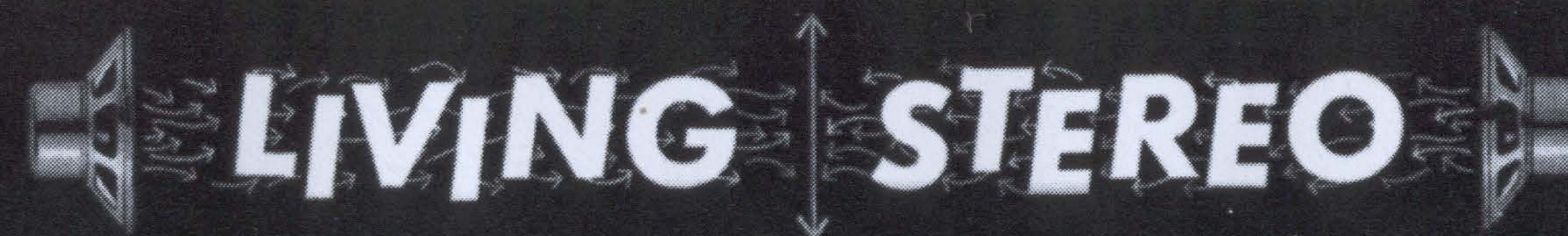


## LA BOHÈME

### Opera in four acts Music by Giacomo Puccini

Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica  
based on episodes from Henri Murger's  
*Scènes de la vie de Bohème*

*First performed at Teatro Regio, Turin, February 1, 1896*



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### THE CAST

*Mimì, a maker of artificial flowers*

*Rodolfo, a poet*

*Marcello, a painter*

*Musetta*

*Colline, a philosopher*

*Schaunard, a musician*

*Benoît, a landlord*

*Alcindoro, a state councilor*

*Parpignol, a toy vendor*

*A Customhouse Official*

*Sergeant*

*Student, working girls, citizens,  
shopkeepers, street vendors,  
soldiers, boys and girls*

*Anna Moffo, soprano*

*Richard Tucker, tenor*

*Robert Merrill, baritone*

*Mary Costa, soprano*

*Giorgio Tozzi, bass*

*Philip Maero, baritone*

*Fernando Corena, bass*

*Giorgio Onesti, bass*

*Adelio Zagonara, tenor*

*Flavio Tosin, baritone*

*Adelio Zagonara, tenor*



## Rome Opera Orchestra and Chorus

**Erich Leinsdorf**, *conductor*

Giuseppe Conca, *chorus master*

Luigi Ricci, Ugo Catania, Fernando Cavaniglia, *assistant conductors*

*Recorded June 15–30, 1961, Rome Opera House*

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**These were original three-track recordings; in Super Audio CD multi-channel mode, the music will be heard only from the front left, center and right channels.**

**To download the libretto for this opera, go to <http://opera.sonybmgmasterworks.com/libretti/livingstereo/> and enter the password "livingstereoopera"**

## DISC 1

### ACT I

- 1 Questo Mar Rosso 0:57
- 2 Nei cieli bigi 2:29
- 3 Già dell'Apocalisse  
appariscono I segni 0:58
- 4 Pensier profondo! 1:16
- 5 Legna! – Sigari! – Bordò! 3:44
- 6 Si può? – Chi è là? – Benoît! 2:46
- 7 Timido in gioventù 3:36
- 8 Chi è là? – Scusi. –  
Una donna! 1:53
- 9 Oh! sventata! 1:38
- 10 Che gelida manina 4:17
- 11 Mi chiamano Mimì 4:34
- 12 Ehi! Rodolfo! 0:40
- 13 O soave fanciulla 3:44

### ACT II

- 14 Aranci, ninnoli! 3:33
- 15 Questa è Mimì 2:33
- 16 Una cuffietta a pizzi 1:48
- 17 Oh! – Essa! – Musetta! 3:09
- 18 Quando me'n vo'  
(Musetta's Waltz Song) 3:24
- 19 Gioventù mia –  
Sciogli, slaccia! 1:11
- 20 Caro! – Fuori il danaro! 2:01



## DISC 2

## ACT III

- 1 Ohè, là, le guardi! Aprite! 1:20
- 2 Chi nel ber trovò il piacer 2:25
- 3 Sa dirmi, scusi,  
qual'è l'osteria 1:32
- 4 O buon Marcello, aiuto! 4:09
- 5 Marcello, finalmente! 1:10
- 6 Mimì è una civetta 4:17
- 7 Donde lieta;  
Addio, senza rancor!  
(Mimì's Farewell) 4:28
- 8 Che facevi, che dicevi 3:28

## ACT IV

- 9 In *un coupé*? 1:18
- 10 O Mimì, tu più non torni 3:04
- 11 Eccoci. – Ebben? 2:16
- 12 *The quadrille and duel* 1:40
- 13 C'è Mimì che mi seque  
e che sta male 5:25
- 14 Vecchia zimarra, senti 2:14
- 15 Sono andati?  
Fingevo di dormire 8:28
- 16 Che ha detto il medico? 2:30

## IMPERISHABLE YOUTH

BY FRANCIS ROBINSON (1961)

The public has a way of being right — at least some of the time. Certainly it can be trusted in its choice of operas if the box office records of the Metropolitan Opera are any gauge. It has been known to reject worthy works but it resoundingly casts its vote in favor of the masterpieces.

The three most popular operas in the repertoire of the Metropolitan based on number of performances there, are A, B and C in that order — *Aida*, *Bohème* and *Carmen*. These are choices nobody need apologize for. The most quarrelsome critic acknowledges their greatness.

If an actuary sat down and figured it out, *La Bohème* probably would come off with first honors. As of the end of the 1961–62 season *Aida* had been performed at the Metropolitan 460 times, *La Bohème* 408 times. But *Aida* came into the repertoire in 1886, three years after the house opened. *La Bohème*

did not have its world premiere until ten years later, 1896, and did not reach the Metropolitan until nearly five years after that.

As late as the mid-forties it still trailed *Lohengrin* and *Faust* in public favor at the Metropolitan, but it has been absent from the repertoire only two seasons since it came in and it shows no sign of relaxing its hold on the public's affection. There are a number of reasons for this, all good.

In the first place *Bohème's* length — or lack of length — is decidedly in its favor. Most operas and a good many plays today are too long. In the prologue to *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare's Chorus makes reference to "the two hours traffic of our stage." This would seem to indicate the greatest playwright of all time had a good idea as to when that mystic bridge which Alexander Woollcott called "the arc of attention" was in for



a strain. Not counting intermissions and applause, *La Bohème* can be performed in Shakespeare's prescribed two hours.

Brevity of itself, of course, is not a virtue and the score of *Bohème* is wondrously fresh and ever new. Its pages, in the words of the late Olin Downes, critic of *The New York Times*, carry "the message of imperishable youth." Who can resist that message? The horseplay of the first half of the opening act quickly gives way to the moonlit bewilderment of young love.

Here there is a sudden change in the orchestra. The rowdiness is over from the moment of Mimì's entrance until Rodolfo's friends call from below, and then a remarkable thing happens. Mimì's aria has ended in D major. The shouts from outside and Rodolfo's replies are in the same tonality. Rodolfo turns and sees Mimì wreathed in moonlight. The stage directions in the score

say "he contemplates her ecstatically." Instead of moving academically into the related key of G major, Puccini sweeps us into the unexpected key of A major. *Bohème* abounds in such masterstrokes, sure and telling.

The second act is one of the most complicated musically in operatic literature but again the effects are sure. All is exuberant, spontaneous and apparently effortless, and Puccini here proves himself not only a poet but also a prophet. The introduction to the act is as descriptive of the bustle of Paris today as of 1830. The opening bars could be the horns of the undiscovered taxis as graphically as we heard them described in *An American in Paris* and in reality before the Paris police silenced them. And to think, at the time he wrote *Bohème*, Puccini had not crossed the Alps and yet he caught the soul of Paris.

The music of Musetta's Waltz was done before the librettists supplied the words. It is a little miracle of characterization. Max Rudolf, a former assistant manager of the Metropolitan and now conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony, says the reason we have so few successful operas today is that contemporary composers have not seemed able to capture musical speech, to define their characters musically. Puccini's characters live and breathe. They literally speak through the music. Note how Puccini goes along with an extended phrase on one note as in the opening measures of Rodolfo's Narrative (*Che gelida manina*).

And now we come to the real heartbreaker of the work, the third act. It opens with the coldest music ever heard, harp and flutes over a hollow fifth in the cellos – progressive fifths which harmony teachers a generation

after *Bohème* had come into being were still telling us we couldn't use. The great ones make their own rules.

Leonard Bernstein used the entire third act of *Bohème* on his telecast *What Makes Opera Great?* to show how music expands drama into opera. He compares it with the Quartet from *Rigoletto* and the Sextet from *Lucia* as providing "a thrill no other art form can provide: the thrill of being able to hear several emotional statements at once."

"You could never do it in a play," Mr. Bernstein says. "People just don't speak simultaneously – that is, if they want to be heard ... But music accomplishes the miracle, because notes are born to sound together, as words are not. And so this ... becomes a moment of striking beauty, instead of a jumble. Reality has been expanded by music into a richness of lyricism whereby we can actually perceive three emotions at the same time.



"This is really the crowning delight of opera: that in the very same moment we can experience conflicting passions, contrasting moods and separate events. And because only the gods have ever been able to perceive more than one thing at a time, we are, for this short period, raised to the level of the gods."

Mimi's Farewell, he points out, takes only thirty-six seconds to read, 210 seconds to sing. "And what golden seconds," Mr. Bernstein exclaims, "because in them time stopped. We have been suspended in a moment of great emotion ... For us it has been both a moment and eternity."

The pathetic story is soon told. We are back in the garret. There is the old-time horsing around which seems to be more than an attempt at gaiety. At the height of the commotion there is a thunderous report from the pit. The door is flung open and Musetta breaks

in with the news that Mimi is below, too weak to climb the stairs. As Rodolfo rushes from the room the orchestra utters a cry of anguish and terror.

When the lovers are finally alone Mimi begins with a touching phrase, *Sono andati* ("They're gone now"), to a heart-wrenching descending melody in C minor. It occurs again fortissimo in the brass as the fact that she is gone finally bears in on Rodolfo and the curtain falls.

"When I began to depict Mimi's death and played those dark chords on the piano," Puccini recalled, "I was so moved that I had to get up. Alone, in the night, I wept like a baby. It was as if I had seen the death of my own child."

*La Bohème*, however, was composed during perhaps the happiest period of Puccini's life. The success of *Manon Lescaut* had set him securely on the road to fame and fortune. At his villa at

Torre del Lago he could indulge his love of duck shooting and surround himself with his friends. They forgathered at a disreputable-looking shack on the shore of the lake called the Club Bohème whose owner had fled to Brazil. Puccini and his other nonpaying guests had reduced him to near bankruptcy. The club rules were prominently posted, such signs as "Silence prohibited," "Fair playing and payment of fines forbidden."

The true-to-life quality of *Bohème* has a double source in reality, the composer's own student days in Milan and the semi-autobiographical novel of Henri Murger, *Scènes de la vie de Bohème*, from which Puccini drew his libretto. Rodolfo, of course, is Murger himself. Marcello is a composite of a writer, Jules Fleury-Husson, known as Champfleury, as well as two painters in Murger's circle named Lazar and Tabar. The latter actually began a picture of the crossing

of the Red Sea, the subject of Marcello's canvas in Act I and III, but was unable to complete it because of the cost of models. He converted it into a less expensive subject, *Niobe and Her Children Slain by the Arrows of Apollo and Diana*, which was exhibited in the Salon of 1842. In Murger's story Marcel's masterpiece undergoes several such transformations.

Schaunard was Alexander Schanne. He dabbled in both painting and music and composed a symphony with the rather fancy title of *On the Influence of Blue in the Arts*. His fellow Bohemians called him Schannard. When his memoirs were published a printer's error renamed him Schaunard and it stuck. Colline, like Marcello, is a combination – a theological student named Wallon who wrote religious tracts, and one Trapadoux of the famous coat.



So much of this struck a responsive chord with Puccini, who himself had been an expert at hand-to-mouth existence and once pawned his overcoat, not, however, for Colline's reasons but to take a young ballerina with the proverbial dancer's appetite out to dinner. In his diary there is an entry describing a less lavish repast: "Supper for four people: one herring," an incident which went straight into the mock-banquet scene of the last act of *Bohème*.

Musetta in real life was a model who sat for Ingres. She came to a sad end when the boat in which she was traveling to Algiers was shipwrecked. Mimì is a composite portrait of several girls, most of whom ended unhappily. One, Lucille Louvet, actually died of tuberculosis. Murger heard it too late to claim her body. Since she was a charity patient in the hospital it went to the university for the medical students

to dissect. Another, whom we know simply as Louise, like Mimì was an embroiderer, and for her Schanone sold his new overcoat for thirty francs and for motives less basic than those for which Puccini parted with his.

In the frail procession of Mimìs were also Juliette and Anais. Murger merged Lucille with Marie Vinal, whom he had met when he was eighteen, to create the heroine of *Francine's Little Muff* and another prop for Puccini. How the composer used these commonplace items to give reality to *Bohème*! He is also his own scenic artist (the smoke from the chimneys of Paris in Act I, the snow in Act III), electrician (the fire when Rodolfo and Marcello consign Rodolfo's manuscript to the fireplace), as well as property man – a one-man stage crew.

It was a grant of 100 lire a month, about twenty dollars, from Queen

Margherita which enabled Puccini to leave his native Lucca for the Milan Conservatory. He was nearly twenty-two which was a good thing. He could not be forced in the academic mold (remember those fifths at the beginning of Acts II and III) and was known to turn in the same fugue on twelve different occasions in as many keys to save the time and trouble on an assignment which held no interest for him. To the end of his days his manuscripts were scandals of illegibility – but, oh, the inspiration.

It took him two years to get the libretto of *La Bohème* out of Illica and Giacosa. Originally it ran twenty acts, but once over the hurdle of the text Puccini dashed off the music in eight months.

*La Bohème* had its first performance on any stage at the Teatro Regio in Turin under Arturo Toscanini. It hurts me very much to say it," an eminent critic

reported, "but frankly this *Bohème* is not an artistic success. There is much in the score that is empty and downright infantile. The composer should realize that originality can be obtained perfectly well with the old established means, without recourse to consecutive fifths and a disregard of good harmonic rules. *Bohème* has not made a profound impression on the listeners, and similarly it will not leave much of a trace in the history of the lyric stage. The composer will do wisely if he writes it off as a momentary mistake. Let him consider *Bohème* an accidental error in his artistic career."

Another speculated, "We wonder what could have started Puccini toward the degradation of this *Bohème*." Still another gave the composer some direct counsel, "You are young and strong, Puccini; you have talent, culture, imaginative ability; but you have today



conceived the whim of forcing the public to applaud you where and when you will. That is all very well for once, but for once only. For the future, turn back to the great and difficult battles of art!"

After the Metropolitan premiere, December 26, 1900, the *New York Tribune* was also aghast at the "degradation." "*La Bohème* is foul in subject, and fulminant but futile in music," the critic sputtered.

So much for the minority report. Permit a non-pro a word. Among Puccini's treasures was a three-line report from another American which might be considered a paraphrase of Théophile Gautier's dictum that empires perish but art endures, a comforting thought in this and, indeed, any time. It reads:

"Men die and governments change but the songs of 'La Bohème' will live forever."  
It is signed: Thos. A. Edison.

**Conductor Erich Leinsdorf with Anna Moffo and Mary Costa**





This performance of Puccini's *La Bohème* was recorded in a three-week period following a week of advance piano rehearsals for cast members and chorus. The orchestral "dress rehearsals" preceded actual recording which, once underway, was accomplished in nine three-hour sessions. Twelve recording channels were utilized and, for synchronization of offstage effects, five portable television relays proved invaluable.

For all its brevity, *La Bohème* is one of the most complicated of operas to record. In its persistently youthful activity, it presents a hydralike succession of problems. Its moods change constantly and abruptly, and each change is the signal for increase or decrease in physical activity on the part of the principals. At least half of the opera is feverishly active, the openings of Acts I and IV and all of Act II being specific instances; the other half is intimate in

scale, introspective in tone.

Planning stage action for the opera was less taxing than its realization. Puccini is most explicit in his own stage directions concerning movement of his principals. In Act I, it was a relatively simple matter to bring off entrances of Colline and Schaunard, the latter laden with wine bottles and paper-wrapped food, but to secure the exact sound of the match being struck to light the stove, the precise metallic ring of Schaunard's coins being thrown regally to the floor, and later the dropping of Mimì's keys as she swoons immediately after her entrance – these were touches of additional realism that occasioned as much worry as a high C or the exact balancing of four voices, each pursuing its own train of thought.

Surprisingly enough, Act II in all its complex of moving crowds and principals proved to be fairly uncomplicated. Marching the military band across stage

at the conclusion of the act, first down an imaginary Rue Dauphin and then up Rue Mazarin, pursued by the entire cast established the spontaneous note from the start. Succeeding takes heightened the effect until that one miraculous moment arrived when, with the session almost finished, we went through the entire act without pause. Much of this version is used in the final recording.

In Act III, physical action lessens but judicious sound effects and varying perspectives enhance the drama. Musetta's offstage song at the start, with its accompaniment of clinking glasses, is always a problem since the glasses in a cheap café must sound like good, serviceable ware and not like champagne tulips. The whip crack over the waiting horse and his answering shudder of sleighbells provides perfect counterpoint preparation for Mimì's arrival, and the crash of overturned dishes becomes the violent herald of

Musetta and Marcello's angry entrance. During Act IV, one hears Rodolfo and Marcello throwing down pen and paint brush preceding "*O Mimì, tu più non torni.*" Later the dance sequence supplies the rapid clatter of a fandango heel barrage, which in its turn is succeeded by a duel of poker and fire tongs so striking in its realism that one can almost hear knuckles being skinned, which indeed happened during one of the takes.

In spite of this multiplicity of effects, musical values were given paramount importance. It is to the credit of all concerned in the cast that they cooperated with utmost good humor and amiability to produce this combined effect of a story realistically recreated through music and the recording art. Because of them, Puccini's masterpiece depicting "a gay life, but a terrible one," lives again.



***The action takes place in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century.***

### **ACT I: A Garret**

It is Christmas Eve, a cheerless one in Marcello's garret, where the stove has long been without fuel. Marcello blows on his nearly frozen hands as he tries to work on his painting *The Passage of the Red Sea*. Rodolfo, unable to write, gazes through the window, watching smoke rise from the chimneys on neighboring roofs; suddenly he turns around, goes to a table and begins tearing up the manuscript of his five-act tragedy to feed the stove. As Colline enters, the fire dies down, and more of Rodolfo's manuscript is thrown in. Schaunard bursts in accompanied by two boys bearing food, wine and firewood. The ensuing feast is cut short by the arrival of the landlord demanding

rent; he is quickly plied with wine – and pushed out. Marcello, Colline and Schaunard depart for the Café Momus, leaving Rodolfo to finish an article.

A few moments later there is a timid knock at the door. It is a young and pretty neighbor, whose candle has gone out. She looks ill to Rodolfo, and he makes her sit down by the stove. He relights her candle, but as she goes to the door she discovers she has lost her key. While they talk, the wind again blows out her candle, and Rodolfo surreptitiously blows out his own. As they search the floor for the key, Rodolfo grasps the girl's hand. He leads her to a chair and tells her who he is and how he lives; then he asks her about herself. "They call me Mimì," she replies, and says she works at embroidering flowers on linens and silks. Rodolfo's companions call from the street, and the poet answers that he will be down shortly,

explaining that he is not alone. Captivated by Mimì, Rodolfo invites her to come with him; she readily agrees, and the two link arms and go out.

### **ACT II: The Latin Quarter**

A festive crowd mills about the public square in front of the Café Momus. Rodolfo and Mimì join the other Bohemians at a sidewalk table and order supper. Presently Musetta, Marcello's former lover, arrives on the arm of the elderly and wealthy Alcindoro. She catches sight of Marcello, but he ignores her; vexed by his disregard, she launches into a waltz song, boasting about her charms and conquests. When she is convinced that Marcello is softening toward her, she begins to complain that her shoe pinches; she orders Alcindoro to get another pair,

and as soon as he is out of sight she and Marcello rush into each other's arms. When the Bohemians' bill is presented, Musetta tells the waiter her gentleman friend will pay it all when he returns. The Bohemians, Mimì and Musetta watch a military patrol that marches across the square; then, along with the crowd, they follow it off.

### **ACT III: A Tollgate at the Edge of Paris**

Dawn is breaking on a bleak and bitter-cold day. Shivering and coughing, Mimì appears and sends a message into a nearby tavern, asking Marcello to come out. When he emerges, she recounts the tribulations of her and Rodolfo's love, his jealousy and their various attempts to break off their affair. Shortly Rodolfo comes out looking for Marcello, and Mimì



hides behind some trees. She overhears her lover tell Marcello how gravely ill she is and how, for her sake, it would be wise for her to leave his unhealthy garret. She begins to cough violently; Rodolfo rushes to her while Marcello, hearing Musetta laughing in the tavern, hastens inside. His love returning at the sight of Mimì's pale, frightened face, Rodolfo tries to embrace her; she breaks away, bids him a tender farewell, and reluctantly he agrees they should part. Musetta and Marcello come out, arguing, as Mimì and Rodolfo, recalling their happiness, decide not to separate until spring.

#### ACT IV: The Garret

Rodolfo and Marcello are trying to work, but they cannot get their minds off Mimì and Musetta, from whom they are again separated. Their melancholy

reverie is broken by the arrival of Colline and Schaunard, bringing food. The four companions are feasting when the door opens, and Musetta enters. She tells them that Mimì is with her and is terribly ill. Rodolfo rushes out, brings the girl in and puts her on the bed. As she and Rodolfo talk quietly, Musetta tells Marcello to sell her earrings to buy a restorative and pay for a doctor. Spurred by her example, Colline resolves to pawn his beloved overcoat; he bids it a poignant farewell and then follows Musetta and Marcello out the door. Schaunard tactfully withdraws so that Rodolfo and Mimì can be alone. They reminisce until a dreadful attack of coughing causes Mimì to faint; when she comes to, Marcello and Musetta have returned, the latter with a muff she gives to the dying girl. Musetta murmurs a prayer as Schaunard, having gone to Mimì's bedside,

whispers to Marcello that she is dead; Rodolfo, sensing what has happened, rushes over and throws himself across Mimì's body, calling her name.



## TECHNICAL NOTES

JOHN NEWTON, SOUNDMIRROR INC.

Since the earliest days of recording, engineers have strived to make recorded sound as immediate and thrilling as natural sound. The earliest electrical recordings were made with a single microphone positioned in the hall for optimum balance. The signal was fed to a cutting lathe, and with the advent of magnetic recording, to a monaural tape recorder; a copy of that tape was used to produce the LPs which consumers listened to at home.

With stereo, two microphones were placed in the hall. Signals were fed to a stereo tape recorder and consumers, listening back on two speakers, heard a new "depth" of sound. By placing microphones in the left, center, and right of the hall, engineers progressed to 3-channel recordings, which afforded them greater control over the musical balances that ended up in the

stereo mix. Even as CDs replaced LPs, this same process was often followed.

Today, with the advent of Super Audio CD and multi-channel playback, the listener can hear the left, center, and right channels exactly as the engineers heard them at the original recording sessions. In this series of Living Stereo reissues on hybrid Super Audio CDs, we have used the 3-channel original tapes whenever they existed; when the material was recorded only in stereo, we used that tape. Some of the Super Audio CDs will therefore contain 2-channel, or a combination of 2- and 3-channel material. We used only two or three of the available six channels on the Super Audio CD disc because that was the vision of the original producers.

In remastering these tapes, we kept the signal path as short as possible. A Studer-Aria analog tape recorder was

connected with premium Siltech cabling directly to specifically chosen dCS converters. This DSD data is directly encoded on the Super Audio CD. Thus the listener is able to hear the output of these converters exactly as we heard it in the studio. The DSD program is essentially identical to the analog tape. What you hear are faithful copies of each historic recording — the pure performance, presented in its original splendor. No signal processing was necessary to "improve" these extraordinary tapes.

Throughout this very exciting project, history came alive as we heard the voices of legendary engineers verbally slating the tapes with the location and date of each session. We were greatly impressed not only with how little the original tapes were edited, but how skillfully engineers edited with their high-tech tool of the day, namely, a

razor blade! Applying the best in 21st-century remastering technology, we believe we have done justice to the best in 20th-century recording technology for a new generation of listeners.