



PEDRO LAVIRGEN

(1930-2023)

A LIFE IN OPERA



PEDRO LAVIRGEN, (1930-2023)

Pedro Lavirgen was born in Bujalance, Córdoba, on 31st July 1930. He was the fifth of seven children of Antonio Luis Lavirgen Martínez and Marcelina Gil Romero. His father had a workshop which made basketwork and other goods from esparto grass. His employees varied in number between about five and 150, depending on the season and the amount of work. Antonio was sometimes a waiter in a café in the evenings.

Pedro's early childhood was happy- he has recalled that he was always singing- but the shadow of the Civil War was growing. When the war started enmity between neighbours soon became evident. Bujalance was in an anarchical area, and Antonio had strong left-wing beliefs. Very soon, in fear of his family's safety, he decided that they should take refuge in the hills. So, with the essentials of their worldly goods loaded on a horse-drawn cart, they walked off into the countryside. This was the beginning of a long period of suffering and misery for the family.

Pedro's youngest brother, still a baby, almost died from malnutrition. They were able in due course to find refuge in a deserted hillside cottage, "La fuente agria".

They went from time to time to the nearest village to buy what little food they could afford, and they often went hungry. They were all ill much of the time because of their appalling living conditions.

Like all children, however, Pedro and his brothers and sisters made the best of things as often as possible, and played in the countryside. But soon there occurred the event that would profoundly change his life. he had an accident, fell badly, and injured his left knee. Because of their primitive living conditions, and the Civil War, suitable medical and orthopaedic treatment was just not available: rudimentary bandaging was not enough. In due course the leg, still inflamed and painful, was contracted, and tuberculosis developed in the knee.

When peace was restored in 1939, the family was able to return to Bujalance, though many of their old antagonisms remained. Pedro's knee was no better, but he was able to go into a hospital run by the monks of San Juan de Dios, where he spent three and a half years. He was still unable to read. He at last had an operation on his knee performed by the surgeon Mr. Francisco Calzadilla in January 1941, and with the good care of the monks, he was eventually able to walk better, but now with a permanently stiff leg.

However, Pedro was profoundly weak and seriously anaemic; food was of variable quality in all such institutions, and he had, like all his family, suffered malnutrition during their period of refuge.

He gradually regained his health and in due course he became a member of the parish choir under the guidance of Ladislao Senostain, who soon promoted him to be soloist. Pedro has spoken of the emotional conflict that he has felt between allegiance to his family and left-wing sympathies on the one hand, and the religious, protective conservatism of the monks to whom he has remained eternally grateful. It was evident that he was temperamentally suited to intellectual pursuits: his disability, though now relatively mild, precluded more vigorous activities.

He was eventually able to become part of the normal school system at 15, and developed into an exceptional student, obtaining the Bachillerato. He also achieved a teaching qualification.

Pedro went to Madrid in February 1954, where he taught young children for six years. While there, he auditioned successfully for a place in the Spanish National Radio Chorus. This had some members at the time who, like Pedro, had great careers ahead: Teresa Berganza and Isabel Penagos. For a time he juggled teaching and choir activities;

but in due course the later won. He became a chorister in the Teatro de la Zarzuela. At the same time he studied music at the Conservatoire, and stagecraft at the Dramatic Art academy. It was during this period that he met a distinguished singing teacher, Miguel Barrosa, who had been a tenor in Italy for about 20 years. Barrosa did much to develop Pedro's voice; and after three years as a chorister, his big chance came. He was in Zaragoza in July 1959, singing in "*Marina*" at the Teatro Fleta. The principal tenor became ill, and at short notice on the 12th of July, Pedro stepped into the demanding role of Jorge. He had a resounding success, and soon afterwards he sang Roberto in "*Bohemios*". In 1960 Jose Tamayo invited him to become principal tenor in the "*Amadeo Vives*" Lyric Company and sang "Fernando" in "*Doña Francisquita*" in many towns. In December 1962 he sang this role in the Teatro de la Zarzuela in Madrid, to such great acclaim that he was awarded the singing Prize for 1962 in Spain.

There was perhaps a little hesitancy on the part of theatre managements to engage a tenor who did not always conform with the traditional picture of the lithe, active romantic hero; but his determination and outstanding vocal qualities soon overcame possible reservations. There was perhaps a parallel in his personal life.

Pedro has recalled that when he was gradually regaining increased mobility after his knee operation, and when he was obliged to sometimes be a passive observer of life, none of the local girls took any notice of him- except one: Francisca Baena, from Bujalance. From this there grew a truly happy and enduring marriage.

With his accumulated triumphs in zarzuelas, it was only a small step into the operatic roles which suited his unique combination of beauty of tone and dramatic involvement. In 1964 he went to Milan in order to further advance his already extensive knowledge of opera. On 12th September of the same year he made his first appearance at the Gran Teatro del Amonastro. On 12th December 1964 he made his first appearance at the Gran Teatro del Liceo, Barcelona, as Don José in "*Carmen*". This was the first of many appearances there; he created a record: he is the only artist to have sung at the Liceo during 19 consecutive seasons.

Other notable debuts followed. After his debut at the Vienna State Opera in "*I Pagliacci*" in April 1966, he sang there for 12 consecutive seasons. One of the most significant debuts was his first performances at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, in "*Tosca*" in November 1968. As a consequence of these appearances the doors of a number of other North American

Opera houses were opened to him, including Hartford, Philadelphia and San Francisco.

There followed more than 20 years of rich and varied appearances world-wide; Between 1978 and 1995 he combined his singing career with teaching at the Real Conservatorio in Madrid. One of Pedro's most notable late appearances was on 10th Maestranza in Seville in which he was of nine of Spain's most illustrious singers. Some years ago a singing competition was established in his name; he has a great interest in fostering the careers of young singers, and the contests have attracted participants of many nationalities.

Pedro Lavirgen's voice had tremendous power, capable of rising to a crescendo which was a sheer torrent of glorious, golden, dramatic sound, allied to a profound commitment, utter involvement in the life of the characters whom he was portraying. It was no coincidence that he treated with equal success the entry of Jorge in "*Marina*" and of the eponymous hero of Verdi's "*Otello*", both requiring enormous vocal strength. For similar reasons I have seen simple but very true remarks like "*he is Canio*". His voice was also able to adapt to a mezza-voce reflecting quite tenderness, as for example in the closing scene of "*Norma*", and in the duet between

Dolores and Rafael in “*La Dolorosa*”. Both the power and the sensitivity are typically to be heard within the duet in “*Bohemios*”.

He was perhaps a little too generous; the power and the tone in the upper part of his voice began to lose their sheen rather earlier than we should have liked. However, he was always true to himself. As he has said “*If vocal music does not come to life and move whoever may listen to it, it is of not value*”. Pedro has also underlined the need for absolute dedication: “*A singer needs a voice, but above all musical and interpretative talent, a great sense of occasion and an absence of personal problems, since much sacrifice as well as travel and long absences are necessary*”.

He achieved sustained success in his very considerable repertoire, and he can rightly be considered both the greatest Andalusian tenor of the second half of the twentieth century, and among the greatest international tenors in the dramatic and spinto repertoire which he made his own.

DAVID SUGDEN

**PEDRO
LAVIRGEN**
RECITAL

PUCCINI

VERDI

LEONCAVALLO

VIVES

LARA



E165HD

PEDRO LAVIRGEN, tenor

OLIVIERO DE FABRITIIS, director

SELECCIÓN
IL TROVATORE

HISTORICAL LIVE PERFORMANCE (1970)

Giuseppe Verdi, (1814-1901)



HD
REMASTERED
HISTORICAL CINEMA LIVE
PEDRO LAVIRGEN EDITION

E166HD

A portrait of a young man with dark hair, looking slightly to the right. He is wearing a dark coat with a prominent red collar that has a gold trim and a small emblem. The background is dark and textured.

PEDRO LAVIRGEN, tenor NAPOLEONE ANNOVAZZI, director

S E L E C T I O N

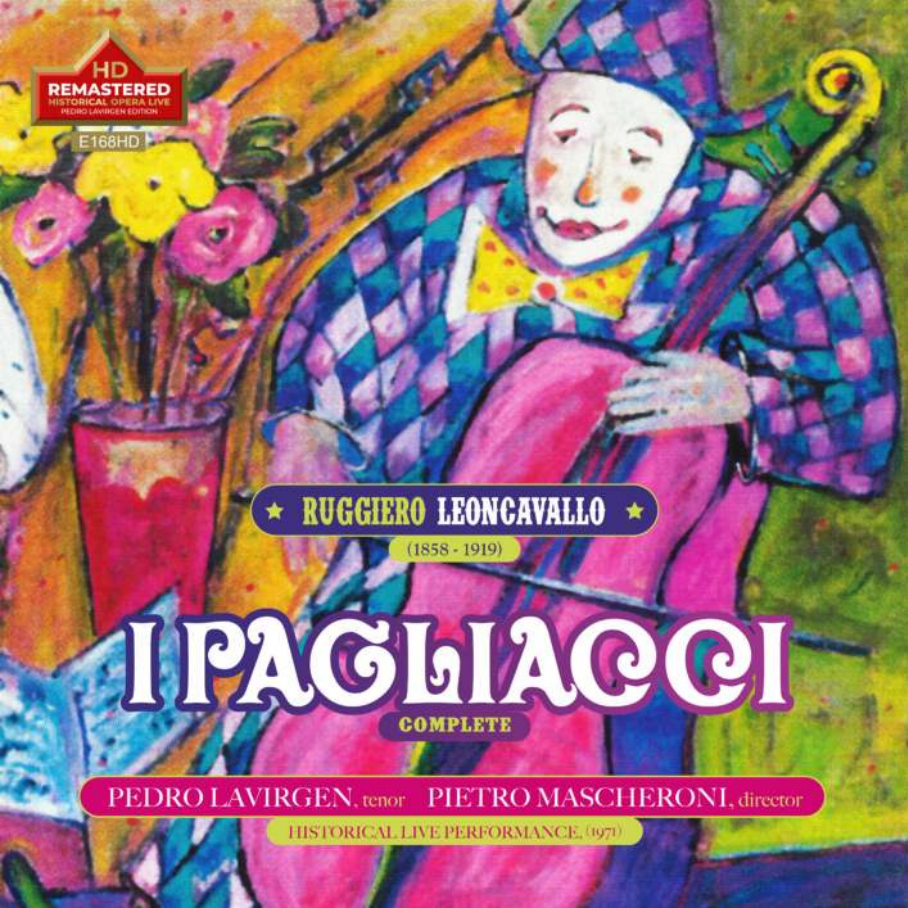
Andrea Chénier

HISTORICAL LIVE PERFORMANCE, (1970)

Humberto GIORDANO
(1868-1948)



E167HD



HD
REMASTERED
HISTORICAL OPERA LIVE
PEDRO LAVIRGEN EDITION

E168HD

★ **RUGGIERO LEONCAVALLO** ★

(1858 - 1919)

I PAGLIACCI

COMPLETE

PEDRO LAVIRGEN, tenor **PIETRO MASCHERONI**, director

HISTORICAL LIVE PERFORMANCE, (1971)

PEDRO LAVIRGEN • JOAN SUTHERLAND
RICHARD BONYNGE

NORMA

VICENZO BELLINI (1801 - 1835)

Live Recording 1970



E170HD

CARMEN

SELECTION

Georges BIZET, (1838-1875)

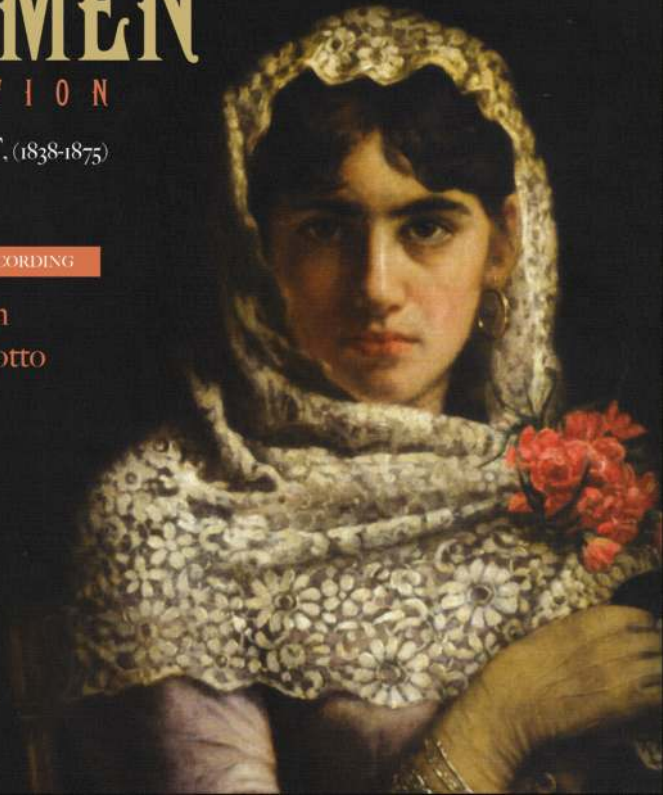
HISTORICAL LIVE RECORDING

Pedro Lavirgen

Fiorenza Cossotto



E171HD



FRANCESCO CILEA, (1866-1950)

ADRIANA LECOUVREUR

LIVE RECORDING 1969

Pedro Lavirgen
Magda Olivero
Carlo Moresco



E173HD

MANUEL DE FALLA, (1876-1946)

LA VIDA BREVE

1972 HISTORICAL LIVE RECORDING

Ángeles Gulin
Pedro Lavirgen
Lucero Tena
Rafael Frübek



GIACOMO PUCCINI, (1858-1924)

TOSCA

1968 HISTORICAL LIVE RECORDING

ANTONIETTA STELLA

PEDRO LAVIRGEN

ENRIQUE GARCÍA ASENSIO

HD
REMASTERED
HISTORICAL OPERA LIVE
PEDRO LAVIRGEN EDITION

E176HD

GIUSEPPE VERDI, (1813-1901)

DON CARLO

1968 HISTORICAL LIVE RECORDING

Fiorenza Cossotto

Pedro Lavirgen

Ottavio Ziino



HD
REMASTERED
HISTORICAL OPERA LIVE
PEDRO LAVIRGEN EDITION

E177HD

Giacomo PUCCINI, (1858-1924)

TURANDOT

1965 HISTORICAL LIVE RECORDING

Pedro Lavirgen
Montserrat Caballé
Birgit Nilsson
William Wildermann
Nicola Rescigno



E180HD

Giuseppe VERDI (1813-1901)

AIDA

SELECTION

Live Berlin 1972 Historical Recording

Pedro Lavirgen
Jesús López Cobos

HD

REMASTERED

HISTORICAL OPERA LIVE
PEDRO LAVIRGEN EDITION

E184HD

VERDI IL TROVATORE

LIVE RECORDING, VIENNA 1973

Ljijana Molnar · Pedro Lavirgen

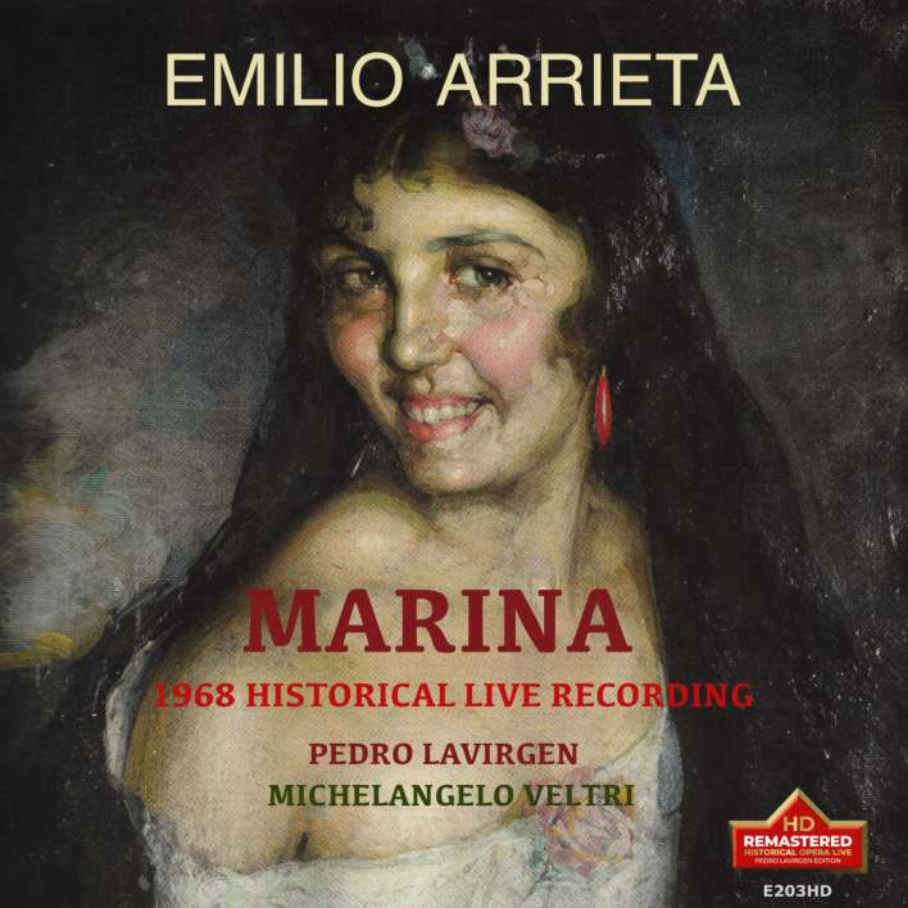


HD
REMASTERED
HISTORICAL OPERA LIVE
PEDRO LAVIRGEN EDITION

E189HD

Alvaro

Don Luis



EMILIO ARRIETA

MARINA

1968 HISTORICAL LIVE RECORDING

PEDRO LAVIRGEN

MICHELANGELO VELTRI



E203HD

VERDI *La Forza del Destino*

Pedro Lavirgen

Rita Orlandi-Malaspina

Piero Cappuccilli

Oliviero de Fabritiis

HISTORICAL LIVE RECORDING

Madrid, 1977

HD
REMASTERED

E214HD

A classical oil painting of a woman with dark, curly hair, looking down and slightly to the right. She has a soft expression and rosy cheeks. She is wearing a red garment.

GAETANO DONIZETTI

LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR

1976 HISTORICAL LIVE RECORDING

PEDRO LAVIRGEN
MADDALENA BONIFACCIO
MARIO D'ANNA
IVO VINCO
GIANFRANCO CASARINI
FERDINANDO CAVANIGLIA



E215HD

GAETANO DONIZETTI

LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR

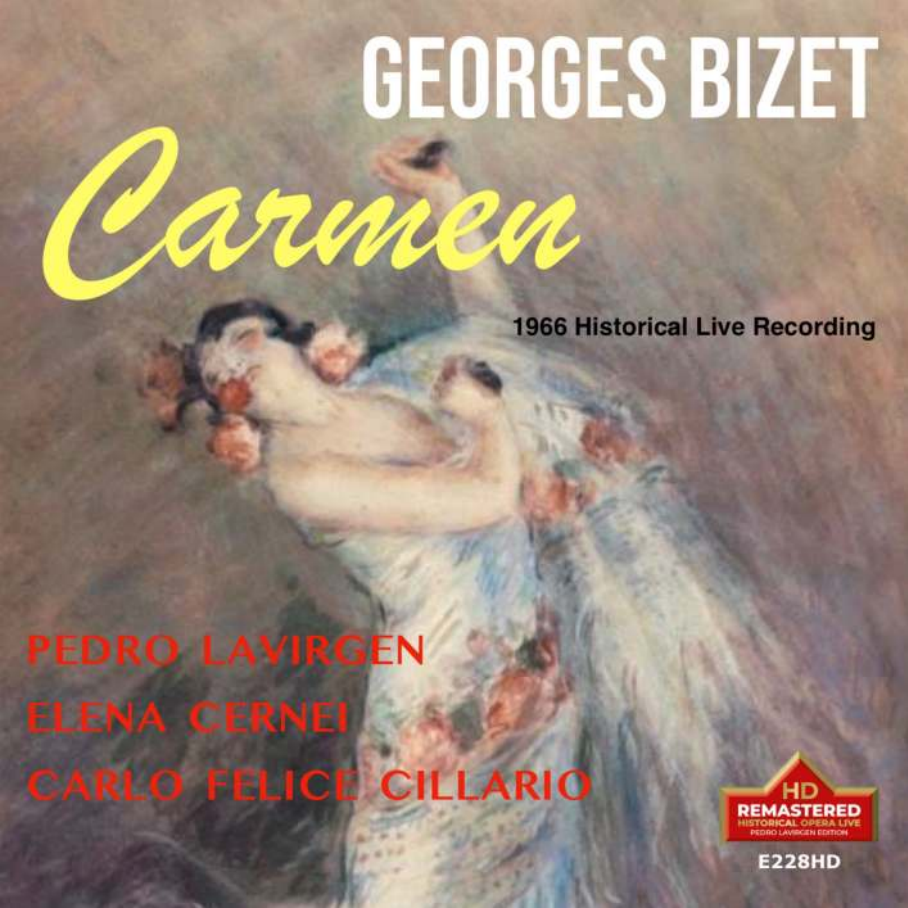
1971
HISTORICAL LIVE RECORDING

Pedro Lavirgen Cecilia Albanese Vicente Sardinero

PIETRO MASCHERONI



E216HD

An impressionistic painting of a woman, likely Carmen, in a blue and white dress with red flowers, holding a cigarette. The background is a textured, earthy brown.

GEORGES BIZET

Carmen

1966 Historical Live Recording

PEDRO LAVIRGEN

ELENA CERNEI

CARLO FELICE CILLARIO



E228HD



LEONCAVALLO

1974 HISTORICAL LIVE RECORDING

PAGLIACCI

PEDRO LAVIRGEN
GIAN PIERO MASTROMEI



E229HD



TURANDOT

PUCCINI

FERNANDO PREVITALI

ANTONIETTA CANNARILE

PEDRO LAVIRGEN

AMY SCHUARD



E230HD

Nápoles, 1972 Historical Live Performance



GIUSEPPE VERDI

UN BALLO IN MASCHERA

PEDRO LAVIRGEN
SALVATORE SASSU

HISTORICAL 1978 LIVE RECORDING

FLORIDA NORELLI
NAPOLEONE ANNOVAZZI



E231HD



Flam.





