



IN PERSON

Ettore Bastianini

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RECORDS Magazine
visits the famous
Italian Baritone
whilst in London

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his range was capable of extending to the surrounds of the tenor register, advised him to consider changing to a baritone, and so after a short break for re-study, he made a second debut—on New Year's Eve 1951—as Germont in "La traviata". A momentous start to the New Year. *La Scala* beckoned soon after, and his first appearance in that house was as *Eugene Onegin* in Tchaikovsky's opera. Since then he has sung all the main baritone roles there, and appears regularly every season. As much as an international singer can look upon any opera-house as his "home company", so Bastianini can claim *La Scala* as his, and he has now made a permanent home in Milan, enabling him also easy access to Vienna, another centre where his services are much in demand. He has another house in Florence, which is conveniently close to his family home in Siena.

Italian Repertoire

Still in his thirties, Bastianini is content at this stage of his career to stick mainly to the Nineteenth Century Italian repertoire, of which Verdi, Rossini and Donizetti form the nucleus. Although he is loth to commit himself, one feels that as an artist and an individual, he is happiest in the rich rewards of the Verdian baritone roles. Certainly modern operas do not attract him, although he made a highly successful debut at the Florence Festival as *Prince Andrei* in Prokofiev's "War and Peace", but that appears about as 'modern' as he is prepared to go. Neither does he feel tempted to try any of the lighter Wagnerian roles, indicating (although with a twinkle in his eye) that he would find it too difficult to learn German. As a matter of fact he is an extremely able linguist, speaking French, English and Spanish with as much authority as his native Italian. Strangely, he does not seem to have included much Mozart opera in his career so far, raising a quizzical eyebrow when it was suggested that he would make an admirable *Don Giovanni*.

LONDON opera-goers enjoyed a long-delayed pleasure a couple of months ago with the first appearance of Italian baritone Ettore Bastianini at Covent Garden. Since this young artist entered the international operatic sphere some ten years ago, demands for his services have taken him all over Europe and North and South America, but he has never been able to fit the offers from London into his busy schedule until now.

Well, the event may have been overdue, but it was worth waiting for. Sgr. Bastianini made his first British appearance as *Renato* in Verdi's "Un ballo in maschera" to great critical and public acclaim. The *London Times* headed their report "Mr. Bastianini's Fine Debut", continuing "his voice was of rich, warm quality, and his phrasing wonderfully shapely. It was an aristocratic performance in every detail".

First London Visit

As this was Bastianini's first visit to London, RECORDS Magazine took the opportunity to go along and meet him. When we arrived at his hotel, he had just been bidding farewell to Maria Callas, leaving London after her London recital, and he regretted that his Covent Garden commitments had not allowed him to attend at the Festival Hall that particular evening. Equable and relaxed, fortified against the extremities of London's cold spell in a sweater and leather jacket, he said that he was enjoying his first sight of London very much, at least, what he could see of it through the blinding snow storms!

La Scala Beckoned

Bastianini appears to be one of those lucky people whom nature automatically provides with a magnificent singing voice—though this is not to belittle the hard work and study that has resulted in his being one of the most sought after young artists of his generation. His family background contains no precedent for an operatic career, although his mother possessed a fine voice, but sang in an amateur capacity only. Bastianini made an early debut as a bass, singing *Colline* in a production of "La Boheme" at Ravenna. However, a perceptive voice coach, noticing that

No Mean Mechanic

We moved to other matters, and at the mention of cars Bastianini pricked up his ears. When we specified sports cars, a seraphic beam crossed his face. He is the proud owner of a German Porsche and a Mercedes 300 SL. Not satisfied with being merely an enthusiastic driver, he is qualified to act as his own mechanic, and is quite capable of stripping down either of his cars and assembling them again in full working order. Although he often drives himself between engagements whilst on the continent, Bastianini had not brought a car with him to London. The perverse British habit of driving on the wrong side of the road (as he puts it) he considers extremely



BASTIANINI as *Renato* in "Un ballo in maschera" at Covent Garden last March.

photo: Dominic

(Continued on Page 21)