

# SHATTERED

BY LESSER OF 2 WEEVILS - 2022

Episode 3

[Shattered theme music.]

**NEMO:** In the early 1900s, the great and good at the Paris Opera buried an urn full of “living voices”—Gramophone recordings of famous opera stars—to be disinterred after a century. When those urns were opened, mysterious recordings, similar to experiments done by Alexander Graham Bell at the Volta Laboratories in Washington D.C. in 1881, were discovered. Who made them? And why?

[Phonograph recording.]

**PHILIPPE COMTE DE CHAGNY:** *Qui sème le vent, récolte la tempête.* [As you sow, so shall you reap.]

**NEMO:** And who wrote the haunting music captured on this piano roll from the early 1900s?

[Excerpt from piano roll.]

**PHIL:** This podcast will investigate the mysterious happenings in turn-of-the-twentieth century Paris at one of its most popular cultural institutions, the Paris Opera, now the Palais Garnier. I’m Phil Donan, and with my colleague—

**NEMO:** --we’re going to use research, sound recording playback technology, and good old-fashioned detective work to try to find you the answers.

[End music.]

[Phil laughs.]

**NEMO:** What? Why is it funny?

**PHIL:** I’m not laughing at you, I’m laughing at me.

**NEMO:** Why? Do you think it’s corny?

**PHIL:** No, not at all. It sounds great. Really . . . serious. Like real journalism . . .

**NEMO:** If you don't like it, we won't use it.

**PHIL:** No, I like it. I'm laughing at me. I don't really listen to myself in recordings very much. It's a bit odd.

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**NEMO:** As you can hear, we have a new theme tune. And a sort of, theme . . . thing. Which I'm calling *The Shattered Podcast*. I thought it sounded pretty good, and Phil agreed to go along with it. While I was pondering over what Monsieur Xavier said, Phil had been doing some thinking about the Count Philippe phonograph recording. Between us, we got in touch with the archive in California, who were able to tell us a bit more about its provenance, how it came to them in the first place. And so Phil was then poring over some old microfilm catalogues of pre-Gramophone recordings. By the way, for those of you younger people, a microfilm is what we had before we had the Internet—it was a way of sort of photocopying lots of text onto a clear plastic roll that we could then look at in microfilm readers. Easier to store than lots of lots of paper, and easier to make copies for libraries and stuff. Actually, I was just a kid when they stopped using them, but Phil remembers them. So he knew how to use them. And what he found led me to the Opera's archives. In all this time I had been employed by the Opera but was working out of the BnF at the François-Mitterrand site.

[Actuality: box being taken off shelf in echo-y room.]

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**NEMO:** What I was hoping to find in that box on the shelf was a 10-inch Gramophone recording. But it was missing. Fortunately, when I went to the head of reader services, I was told there was a CD.

**PHIL:** A CD made of a 78 from a reissued disc . . . a dropped and destroyed disc . . .

**NEMO:** . . . whose stamper had already been destroyed.

**PHIL:** Yeah, yeah, that.

**NEMO:** Do you know what you're actually saying?

**PHIL:** Not really, no. (laughs)

**NEMO:** For those who maybe coming to this podcast for the first time, or if you missed the opening, this is Dr Phil Donan.

**PHIL:** You'll have to forgive me, but I'm used to LPs. You know, vinyl records?

**NEMO:** Yeah.

**PHIL:** So it's just the size of the disc that makes it a Gramophone?

**NEMO:** That's a good question. The original recording would have been a "red label" celebrity disc. It starts with Emile Berliner.

[Typing sounds and a tone.]

**PHIL:** Okay, you've just sent me what? The EMI recording angel? And it says E. Berliner's Gramophone?

**NEMO:** Emile Berliner was a German immigrant to the United States who supplied the technology for mass-producing discs—as opposed to cylinders—in early sound recording technology.

**PHIL:** Sure, so, 1920s we're talking?

**NEMO:** No, much earlier. His work started in the late 1880s. A true Berliner describes a process, an etched-zinc technique.

**PHIL:** And that's what, what, that's—I mean, what is that?

**NEMO:** This original recording is a different process, and there would have been, like a, like, like a paper label. It would have been a red label, or maybe a pink label, showing that this recording would have been relatively expensive to buy. The new method is called the "wax process" involving a direct cut groove instead of an etched one, but still needing electrotyping in order to make a negative stamper.

**PHIL:** Oh right, well, you've lost me now.

**NEMO:** Okay, forget about the process. A 10-inch Gramophone is going to give you about 3 minutes of playing time. And these . . . not replaced . . . what's the word?

**PHIL:** Uh . . . superseded?

**NEMO:** Yeah. The older 7-inch Berliner recordings from 1901 onwards. So it has to be post-1900; earlier than the official recordings from the Palais Garnier urns, but similar. 1902 is when the first Caruso recordings were made. Caruso was issued on a red label. Or was it pink . . .?

**PHIL:** Ah, okay, Caruso! THAT's a name I recognize!

**NEMO:** Yeah.

**PHIL:** Enrique Caruso, the famous opera singer.

**NEMO:** Yes.

**PHIL:** Wait. Was he Italian or Spanish? No, no, must be Italian. Enrico Caruso.

**NEMO:** Yeah.

**PHIL:** Yeah, see you need to explain stuff like that. Believe me, you can't assume anyone knows what you're talking about.

**NEMO:** I thought everyone knew . . .

**PHIL:** ANYWAY, we've established a probable date. Who is this recording actually supposed to be?

**NEMO:** Yes, okay. I think I mentioned Adelina Patti earlier on. One of the biggest opera singers of her day. Though by the time she was making recordings, she was in her sixties. Well, one of her rival divas was a Swedish soprano named Christine Nilsson. And so, I wasn't too surprised that this Gramophone recording was labelled to be a single and rather unique recording of Christine Nilsson.

**PHIL:** But I was surprised. Because Christine Nilsson never recorded. She basically left singing in 1888 after she married the Count Casa di Miranda.

**NEMO:** So, not only would this recording be unique, but it would--

**PHIL:** --be dear, as I'm sure the head of your reader services quickly realized.

**NEMO:** Uh, dear?

**PHIL:** You know. Worth a mint?

**NEMO:** Yes, oookay. That's why we tried to trace what had happened to the original disc. As all we had was the CD. So it was issued as a 78—that's a record made out of shellac—and then the original stamper was destroyed, so the 78 was the only known copy. And the 78 is now also missing, so all we've got is the CD.

**PHIL:** So we were very lucky. And you were able to get a copy of the CD?

**NEMO:** Now I've learned from last time: much as I would love the drama of revealing this recording before your very ears, I didn't want a big disappointment . . .

**PHIL:** So we've screened this recording.

**NEMO:** But we agree that it's well worth a listen, so we're gonna play it for you now.

[Gramophone disc excerpt of soprano singing in French accompanied by piano.]

**NEMO:** So you don't need us to tell you that this is the same piece of music from that piano roll that was buried with the Gramophone recordings in the Palais Garnier.

**PHIL:** And we don't think this is Christine Nilsson. It's impossible to be sure, given that we have no canonical recordings of her, but it seems very unlikely that she would have retired from the stage and then consented to a single, virtually untraceable Gramophone recording in 1902. But I have another candidate, which is totally plausible given a simple case of mislabelling.

**NEMO:** Phil has suggested this might be, instead, a recording of a minor opera singer of the time, Christine Daaé. Because she was a Swedish soprano as well, with an important Paris Opera connection—and she married Count Philippe de Chagny's younger brother . . .

**PHIL:** Raoul de Chagny.

**NEMO:** And after their marriage, she kind of disappeared from record.

**PHIL:** Like Count Philippe. A lot of disappearing going on here.

**NEMO:** So now we do believe it's possible that Count Philippe is the composer, but that still doesn't explain the presence of the cylinders, the piano roll, and why a Gramophone recording of Christine Daaé should be mislabelled in the *bibliothèque-musée*.

[Intriguing outro music.]

**PHIL:** And who your mysterious Dude A is.

**NEMO:** Yes.

So once again we are left with more questions than we have answers—

[Phil laughs.]

**NEMO:** Why are you laughing? I'm trying to--

**PHIL:** I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I really am, you carry on.

**NEMO:** I, but, I, you--

**PHIL:** I'm sorry. Absolutely. More questions than answers.

**NEMO:** Join us next time as we try to trace the mysterious composer and whoever made these recordings.

**End credits:**

*The Shattered Podcast* is hosted by Nemo and Dr Phil Donan, with music by Katie Seaton. It is produced by Leslie McMurtry and is a Lesser of 2 Weevils production 2022.