

SHATTERED

BY LESSER OF 2 WEEVILS - 2022

Episode 4

[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.]

COUNT PHILIPPE 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.

[Pause.]

PHIL: Well, what are you waiting for?

NEMO: I was expecting you to laugh.

PHIL: I was on my best behavior.

NEMO: Clearly. So, Phil had a bit of a brainwave about the Gramophone disc from last time, the one we think was Christine Daaé rather than Christine Nilsson. So go on, well—

PHIL: Yeah, uh—

NEMO: No, you go ahead.

PHIL: So, I thought I would try to look up the music on the International Music Score Library Project, which is a kind of massive . . .

NEMO: Creative Commons Wiki . . .

PHIL: Yeah, yeah. To see if anything existed. And in the anonymous section, pieces for which we don't have any recognized composer, I did find something that matched the piano roll, something that matched the song on the disc.

NEMO: And Phil sent me the link, and there was this little line in the Wiki:

BOTH: "Attributed to M. Giry."

NEMO: This "M. Giry" wasn't ringing any bells for either of us. So I paid a visit to one of the other BnF sites, Richelieu. And . . . misfiled in the *musique notée* section was . . .

PHIL: Something called "Charlotte's Song" from *Don Juan Triumphant*.

NEMO: "La Chanson de Charlotte" de l'opéra de *Don Juan Triumphant*.

PHIL: Logically, then, this is the same piece on the piano roll and the same piece sung on the disc by Christine Daaé—

NEMO: Allegedly—

PHIL: So also logically, it seems to have come from an opera called *Don Juan Triumphant*.

NEMO: Phil is doing some researching to find out if this was ever performed, which might lead us to Count Philippe or whoever the actual composer is, and we might in turn find out—

PHIL: Why those cylinders were deposited in the Palais Garnier—

NEMO: And who Dude A is. The interesting part is that in the sheet music for "La Chanson de Charlotte," the composer is given as "M. Giry," but someone has crossed that out, in pencil, and written "Erik."

PHIL: Which is very mysterious.

NEMO: And frankly a little weird.

PHIL: And a biiiiit comical. It's not a very French name, is it?

NEMO: No, it isn't.

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NEMO: Phil and I pondered this. Meanwhile, I was walking down the street when I got a phone call. I recognized the number.

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[Actuality from walking down Paris street: traffic.

A cell phone tone.]

NEMO: *Âllo?* [Hello?]

MME BARRÉ:(on phone) *Âllo.*

NEMO: *C'est vous, Madame! Je suis très contente que vous m'appellez.* [It's you, Madame! I'm really happy you called.]

MME BARRÉ: *Oui, Madame, j'ai des très bonnes nouvelles.* [Yes, Madame, I have some good news.]

NEMO: *Qui concerne "La Chanson de Charlotte"?* [Which concerns "Charlotte's Song"?)

MME BARRÉ. *Oui, c'est évident.* [Yes, it would seem so.]

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[Glitch, distortion, echoes and delays.]

PHIL: Nemo.

NEMO: Yes.

PHIL:: Like Captain Nemo from *10,000 Leagues Under the Sea*?

NEMO: Not like Captain Nemo.

PHIL: Or *Finding Nemo*?

NEMO: (laughing) No.

PHIL: Nemo, as in Latin for "no one."

NEMO: Yes.

PHIL: But you won't tell me your real name.

NEMO: No. Just Nemo for now. Is that okay?

[PHIL clears his throat.]

NEMO: If you must know, it was my brother's nickname.

PHIL: Your brother calls you “no one”?

NEMO: No, someone else called him Nemo.

PHIL: “Called”?

NEMO: Yes. He’s, uh, he’s dead.

[Mobile phone rings. Bach’s Toccata and fugue.]

NEMO: Sorry.

PHIL: You’re still not going to answer it.

NEMO: Sorry if my late night calls are disturbing your wife.

PHIL: No wife.

NEMO: Girlfriend.

PHIL: No.

NEMO: Boyfriend?

PHIL: No.

[Feedback and distortion.]

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NEMO: I have left that recording in, with Madame Barré, a little tantalizing—and possibly a little frustrating if you don’t speak French—but I promise we will get to the exciting news she had to tell me. Right now, though, I want to play you a really interesting interview Phil did with a cultural historian on the Don Juan legend. While he was trying to find out if the *Don Juan Triumphant* opera exists and whether it was ever performed, he thought it might help me—and some of you—to understand this more clearly. I even taught him how to record a podcast . . . sort of.

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[Actuality: the interior of a busy coffee shop with pop music playing softly in the background.]

PHIL: Hello there, I’m Phil Donan recording on behalf of the *Shattered Podcast*. I’m in Brighton today, in southern England, speaking to Amelia Docherty. Dr Docherty is a specialist in European literature, particularly Spanish Golden Age drama, and cultural history. Thank you so much for speaking to us, Dr Docherty.

DOCHERTY: A pleasure.

PHIL: So, I've filled Dr Docherty in on the trails of recordings that my colleague in Paris has been tracing, and she has agreed to tell us a little bit about Don Juan.

DOCHERTY: Okay, so when we think of Don Juan, we think of a womanizer.

PHIL: I totted up some synonyms, Doctor, such as Lothario, Casanova . . .

DOCHERTY: Yes, those are all right, but all of those are all proper names that have come to represent a type.

PHIL: And Don Juan was fictional?

DOCHERTY: Yes, he was fictional and became allegorical. Leo Weinstein wrote that Don Juan is at his best in a society that keeps its women behind barred windows, and that's the society in which this character was conceived, in 17th century Spain, in a play called *The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest*.

PHIL: That title really puts me in mind of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

DOCHERTY: Yes, similar themes run throughout the Don Juan legend. In the original play, Don Juan disrupts state-sponsored visions of Catholic matrimony. He leaves four women at the altar and then is symbolically bound to the Stone Guest as just punishment for his sins. He is cast into the abyss. Don Juan's motto, if you like, is *Tan largo me lo fiáis*, which roughly translates to, "I've still got plenty of time."

PHIL: Ah, and tell me, Doctor, does Don Juan have a long history in French culture?

DOCHERTY: Yes, in fact, he does, from Molière's play of the 1660s to the novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* by Laclos from about a century later.

PHIL: And would you say that Don Juan had a place in 1880s Paris? I think it could be argued that this was a society that kept its women behind barred windows, or at least the bourgeoisie did.

DOCHERTY: Yes, perhaps. Don Juan also had an aspect as a trickster, an agent of anarchy. But later in the 19th century, Don Juan was represented as someone who transgresses society's laws, but is moved to repentance by a woman.

PHIL: And what do you make of a title like *Don Juan Triumphant*?

DOCHERTY: It's really hard to say. I'd need more context.

PHIL: Well, I hope we can provide you with some soon. Thanks again, Dr Docherty.

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NEMO: Great work there, Phil.

PHIL: Well, that's very kind. Thank you.

NEMO: And yes, here he is now, joining me online. As promised, I have some very interesting news to share with you regarding what Madame Barré discovered. I had told her about the Volta Laboratory-type ones that were buried in the urns, which started this whole podcast. And she said, in Richelieu's collections, they had a set of two recordings like this, which no one had ever been able to do anything with, oddly, because really they should have been transferred over to where I work in Tolbiac. She was very sort of down-to-earth about it, but she said there was always some problem, whether it came down to money or a strike or something, that had prevented them from being moved over to Tolbiac and properly inspected and catalogued.

PHIL: And there were other things they were saying about these recordings, right?

NEMO: Yes, unsubstantiated rumors that these recordings were among the ones stolen from the urns that were deposited in 1912. There are various problems with that theory, 'cause those were supposed to be Gramophone recordings that went missing without a trace. But, for all we know, they could have been buried in those 1912 urns originally. And with that in mind, Madame Barré was actually delighted to hand them over to me and by extension Tolbiac, so something could be done with them. Obviously, my interest was piqued as I could tell just by looking at them that they matched the ones buried in the urns in every obvious way.

PHIL: And because, listeners, we have your best interests at heart, we've had a sneaky listen to these cylinders first, because we didn't want to disappoint you.

NEMO: I've digitized them now and—

PHIL: You won't be disappointed.

NEMO: So we'll play them both for you now.

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Wax cylinders 3 & 4 (translated into English)

DUDE A: Do you not think, Daroghah, the Shahinshah would have delighted in a device that could serve as his ears as well as his eyes?

DUDE B: I think no good can come of this.

. . .

DUDE B: I am not superstitious. I simply think shouting into this horn is folly, Erik.

DUDE A: You have such a shrinking soul. I would tell my story, of years in India, Persia, Batavia, England, for no one need know who I am; I am just a voice . . .

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NEMO: This is potentially the most exciting recording we've heard yet, because it seems very likely that these are the same two voices we heard on the original cylinders.

PHIL: And very intriguingly, we seem to have identified your Dude A.

NEMO: As someone called Erik. And like we said, that's not a very French name—he's not being called *Éric*, but Erik, sounding very Scandinavian though oddly not with much of a Scandinavian accent.

PHIL: So perhaps he is the composer of *Don Juan Triumphant*? Because in that score, the "M. Giry" was scribbled out in pencil, and someone had written "Erik." And how many men named Erik could have been associated with the Paris Opera in the 1880s? I honestly don't think it's a coincidence.

NEMO: Which means Count Philippe de Chagny, who made the one Edison phonograph recording we heard from the collection in California, possibly others, but regardless—may *not* be the composer.

PHIL: Yet Count Philippe is clearly involved, because of that *abonné* receipt.

NEMO: And Christine Daaé, we think, knew about *Don Juan Triumphant*, because she sang "La Chanson de Charlotte."

PHIL: I am dying to know if this opera still exists or if it was ever performed.

NEMO: "Music that burned."

PHIL: Fingers crossed, we'll have plenty to tell you next time.

[Shattered outro music.]

End credits:

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