

SHATTERED

BY LESSER OF 2 WEEVILS – 2022

Language advisory on this episode – some adult language is used

Episode 10

[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.]

LAILA: “They are plans drawn up by Erik who became fascinated by cylinder sound recording.”

[Parléophon recording, piano and soloist.]

NEMO: Spooky.

PHIL: Yeah.

SIMEON: *“Hésitez sur les ombres, qui, quand vous tournez, bougent,*

Et faites l’attention de la musique qui brûle.” [Watch out for the shadows that move as your head turns,

And be careful of the music, the music that burns.]

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.

NEMO: I really want to thank the listeners for all your interest and support. It means a lot to me. And I want to apologize to Phil for having used that recording in the last episode and making it available after he asked me not to.

PHIL: Well, that's okay. I-I'd just appreciate if you didn't do it again.

NEMO: It's . . . unfortunate that a promising relationship that we were building with Dustin and Dani in Chicago has led to—

PHIL: An altercation.

NEMO: And I thought the easiest way to set the record straight was to give the facts and let them speak for themselves.

PHIL: Of course, if Dustin wants us to take this episode down, he knows how to get in touch.

NEMO: I had been at Père Lachaise Cemetery doing some research and had gotten a missed call from Dustin. When I got back to my friend's house, where I'm staying, I called him back.

Phone conversation:

NEMO: Hi, Dustin, I'm returning your call . . .

DUSTIN: Wow. You have got some nerve.

NEMO: I'm sorry, I don't—

DUSTIN: I know that you've been having money problems, but doing this?! This is not how you go about it!

NEMO: I don't understand—

DANI: Young woman, you're meddling in things that—

DUSTIN: Will you shut up, Dani, you're not helping! If I can find a shred of evidence, I'm going to sue. You know that, right? This is my livelihood!

NEMO: Evidence? What am I supposed to have done?

DANI: She acts so innocent!

DUSTIN: Or was it something Phil Donan fixed up on your behalf? Because I could tell you a thing or two about him . . .

NEMO: Please, Dustin, I don't know what you're talking about.

DUSTIN: Let me be clear then. If you don't return the graphophone, I will sue.

NEMO: What I eventually found out is that someone broke into Dustin's shop, So Good They Named It Twice. Of course, it's full of priceless treasures, like Art Nouveau busts and a mid-century *Jetsons*-style TV. But the only thing that appears to have been stolen was the graphophone recorded, we think, in 1897 with, we think, Hosein'ali Khan, the Daroghah of Mazandaran, and an unknown interviewer.

PHIL: Dustin, or rather Dani—drawing on her psychic intuitions—has leapt to the conclusion that one of us, or both of us, arranged for it to be stolen. Coincidentally, or not so coincidentally as Dustin believes, shortly after he discovered his shop had been burgled, OurSounds.org called him, saying there had been a freak power surge in their server room, and they had lost some of their recordings, including the digitized copy of the graphophone. He thought that, with *The Shattered Podcast* now being the only place in existence that had a copy of that recording, we wanted to sell it back to him or somehow profit off it. Which we don't. We've even offered to give him our recording. And of course we had nothing to do with either the theft or the wiping of Our Sounds' servers. I mean, how could we?

NEMO: This is what Dustin said in his last e-mail. "I feel very hurt and betrayed by what you have done. I was genuinely interested in the mystery behind *The Shattered Podcast*, and I felt I had contributed a great deal to its current success and the direction in which it has gone. I have a genuine love for vintage collectors' items, which is why I do what I do. I cannot prove that you are responsible, so I withdraw my promise of legal action. I, however, believe that you are suffering from some serious issues and do not want to have anything else to do with you or *The Shattered Podcast*." That's Dustin's message. To the listeners, the only thing I can say is to apologize again for having inspired such emotions and accusations and, just, reiterate that we had nothing to do with these unfortunate events that have befallen Dustin.

PHIL: I did suggest that, in wake of this unhappy incident, we rest the podcast for a bit—

NEMO: But I was determined, more than ever, that the truth needs to be uncovered. We've been following so many different strands, and we're so close to answering many of the questions we've been asking for weeks . . .

PHIL: It so happened that when I spoke to Laila in London earlier this week, when she was commiserating with us over what had happened—and of course expressing sympathy with Dustin—that she had another interesting piece of the puzzle to contribute.

[An echo-y classroom.]

PHIL: Hi Laila, thank you so much for this.

LAILA: It's my pleasure, Phil.

PHIL: Do you want to tell us first a bit about how you came across this recording?

LAILA: Okay, you know the BBC?

PHIL: Yes.

LAILA: But do your listeners know . . . ?

PHIL: Oh, right, right, yeah. The British Broadcasting Corporation.

LAILA: In the UK, there is something called BBC work experience, which you can apply for to work in various departments of the BBC.

PHIL: Like an internship.

LAILA: Like an internship. Between finishing my degree and wanting to start a Masters, I was thinking about training to be a broadcast journalist. So I applied to be on the scheme and was accepted. So I had a three-week stint at Radio 4, shadowing the Broadcast Assistant, that kind of thing.

PHIL: I'll take your word for it, I don't know anything about it.

LAILA: Well, when I did my work experience, I got access to the software that the BBC uses, including a database where it stores various clips and completed programs from the past. Yes?

PHIL: I'm with you so far.

LAILA: And when you were filling me in initially on the cylinders and the music and the various pieces of evidence that you'd assembled, the name "Giry" struck me. It's quite

unusual. I remembered having seen it before somewhere. And then I remembered that I had seen it in the BBC catalogue. Someone had needed an archival report from 1939 and this was the record, you know, in the system next to it.

PHIL: Adjacent to it, in the catalogue?

LAILA: Yes. But the BBC had never rebroadcast the segment so I couldn't find it on Radio 4 Extra when I looked again. So what I did was to source the recording from the British Library Sound and Moving Image archive, who had the BBC digitize it. It had come straight from the BBC archives in Perivale. I think they said it was still on magnetic tape from the 1930s.

PHIL: Can you tell me the title of this program from the 1930s?

LAILA: It was an interview with the Baroness de Castelot-Barbezac *née* Giry.

PHIL: Okay, so for our listeners, it should be clear why Laila had an interest in this recording for *Shattered*: someone with the Giry surname, who could be connected to the supposed composer of *Don Juan Triumphant*.

LAILA: Yes!

PHIL: So when she told me about it, I knew we had to hear it. Fortunately, I have a friend of a friend of a friend who was able to get it put on CD—because normally you can't take any recordings away from the British Library. It's a reference library. Laila has already heard this program, but I haven't. So let's listen, shall we, to this interview from 1939 with Meg Giry.

[Pre-WWII BBC broadcast recorded on magnetic tape. Hissy and lo-fi.]

BBC ANNOUNCER: The Baroness de Castelot-Barbezac will be known by many who move within the most exalted circles. She was born in the second half of the last century and lived through the Siege of Paris. She is the mother of the celebrated étoile of the Paris Opéra, the famous Cécile Giry, now Lady Cavendish. When she retired to this country after the Great War, she became known to many as a firm supporter of diverse charities, sharing her wealth with those who needed it most. Having penned her memoirs, she has graciously consented to tell her story over the wireless for the BBC. Good morning, Baroness.

MEG: Good morning. As a young widow and mother in the year '95, supervising my two daughters as dancers appearing in the Paris Opéra, my life could not have been more different than it is today. Yet, you will not scorn me for looking back on those romantic days with a certain fondness. Believe me, when my daughters attained the rank of coryphée in

the ballet, my heart swelled with great pride at their admittance to the *foyer de la danse*. Now such a life is far behind us. You have mentioned one daughter's career as a celebrated dancer, which led her, and I, to reside in London, which has been my home for the past decade. But I am just as proud of my days as a businesswoman. *À Paris*, I was *L'Emperatrice des imprimantes*, that is to say, I managed, with great success, our printworks, with my husband. We specialized in *les partitions*—printed music.

My second husband, the Baron de Castelot-Barbezac, was extremely fond of music, and the Opéra, and of ballet. He and I knew many artists at the Opera of the Third Republic. I remember that La Sorelli was very superstitious and had a horseshoe put up at the doorkeeper's vestibule. Who knows what terrible thing might befall us if it hadn't been put there with the utmost sincerity and belief? That venerable lady, no longer with us, retired to Louveciennes.

And so it was with myself, after the death of my husband the Baron; I took myself off to Nice with my daughter Marguerite, who taught the highest class of dancers at a ballet school there.

After decades spent in Paris, I was faced with the choice of where to enjoy the fruits of so many years of labor: with my daughter Marguerite in Nice, my daughter Lady Cavendish in Londres, or my daughter Mrs Franklin Hull in New York. It was truly, as you say in English, an embarrassment of riches.

BBC ANNOUNCER: You have mentioned, Baroness, that some of your fondest memories are of your youth in Paris, when your mother, Madame Marguerite Giry, was still living.

MEG: Yes, my mother was a formidable woman, and the world was the much lesser for it when she left for Heaven in the year '83.

BBC ANNOUNCER: Is there any truth to the story, frequently told by Augustus Hare and recorded by him in *Peculiar People: The Story of My Life*, that you are one of the fashionable women, along with Cléo de Mérode, Liane de Pougy, and La Belle Otero in the famous drawing of the Bois de Boulogne?

MEG: Fashionable I may have been, but never in the same class as Madame de Mérode.

BBC ANNOUNCER: Thank you for this most illuminating discussion, Baroness.

NEMO: Meg Giry. Became the Baroness de Castelot-Barbezac. "M. Giry." A ballerina.

PHIL: According to Wikipedia, the Baroness de Castelot-Barbezac was 75 years old when she died the year after that recording was made, in 1940. When her house suffered a direct hit by an incendiary bomb.

NEMO: That's sad.

PHIL: Yes, it is.

NEMO: She didn't talk about being a dancer herself. She said one daughter was a ballet star and another one taught ballet . . . She even talked about her sheet music printing career. If career is the right word. She knew a thing or two about the music business.

PHIL: Well, it was all right for her daughters because they had made good. It sounds like they married really well.

NEMO: Didn't she "make good"? She became a Baroness!

PHIL: Think about the chronology. She didn't become a ballet star like Cécile and had that first marriage. It was only well after that that the Baron de Castelot-Barbezac married her. Talking about her own youth in the Opera might have . . . well, made some listeners uncomfortable. The *foyer de la danse* in her time wasn't just a place for young dancers to graduate to. Many of the ballerinas slept with much older married men; it was the opera house's dirty little secret. The *abonnés* would come to the *foyer de la danse* and buy the girls champagne and—

NEMO: Is that what happened to Meg Giry? Is that how she met the Baron?

PHIL: But he *married* her. That's the difference. The same with her two daughters. The Giry family must have had something to attract men of the titled class.

NEMO: But it was much more common for them to become . . . what's the word? Mistresses? Courtesans?

PHIL: Sometimes, yes.

NEMO: Who were the *abonnés*? You've said before they were men with subscriptions, like season tickets to the opera, but who were they? Businessmen or what? Were they, like, police or the law? How did they get away with it?

PHIL: Well, that's just the way it was. This was a pre-MeToo era.

NEMO: I'm not stupid, Phil, I know that.

PHIL: Well . . . Women at the opera didn't leave their boxes during the entr'acte. So it was just men and the dancers mingling. Some of the *abonnés* were in the law and medicine,

some were high officials in the government or the military . . . there were probably about just over a hundred at any one time. The *élite de l'élite* had boxes three times a week. Like Count Philippe. That's what his receipt said he'd arranged.

NEMO: That's a lot of opera. Or were any of them actually going for the opera?

PHIL: Some must have been genuine music lovers. Some of the dancers in the opera would have escaped to better lives.

NEMO: So, Meg Giry, the Baroness, was only in her teens when she was a ballerina?

PHIL: Right enough, yes.

NEMO: Yes?

PHIL: Well, if you had become a Baroness, you'd probably want to forget all about that time, too.

NEMO: It doesn't seem likely, from all of this, that Meg wrote *Don Juan Triumphant*, does it? Surely, if she was writing her memoirs, that's the first thing she'd want to tell the BBC.

PHIL: It's still possible, but it seems unlikely that, if she had that kind of talent, that she wouldn't have monetized it somehow.

NEMO: What do you mean? Meg had married into the aristocracy. She had money by that point.

PHIL: Yes, but by the 1890s the Castelot-Barbezacs were nearly penniless. They were completely ruined in the aftermath of the First World War. The title meant something, of course, but in real money terms—

NEMO: So, maybe, between her first and second marriage, Meg Giry somehow got hold of the music from *Don Juan Triumphant* and sold it under her maiden name?

PHIL: Who knows? The sale might have tided her over. But where and how she got it . . .? There's a very sad little piece of anecdotal writing published about the same time from the letters of La Sorelli—

NEMO: The dancer the Baroness mentioned in her interview?

PHIL: The very one, yes. There's reason to believe Meg and La Sorelli were close, but in that BBC interview, she clearly didn't want to come out and say anything, as that would have meant acknowledging that she had come from the corps de ballet. La Sorelli, in her published letter, which comes towards the end of her life, talks about her longstanding affair with Count Philippe de Chagny.

NEMO: Oh wow.

PHIL: Which is in no way unusual in and of itself. What's unusual is that Sorelli talks about carrying a stiletto—that's like a really small dagger—at her side the whole time she was at the Paris Opera.

NEMO: What was she scared of?

PHIL: The implication is that not only was the Count Philippe a completely conventional man of his time and his class—

NEMO: Taking advantage of women—

PHIL: But that he was violent.

[Pause]

PHIL: Um, are you okay there . . .?

NEMO: I'm fine. That information puts a different complexion on his disappearance. Like, maybe Sorelli had to use her stiletto on him. If her life was in danger.

PHIL: I don't think Sorelli killed him.

NEMO: I can—I can—I can sort of understand the need to reinvent yourself like Meg Giry did.

Phone conversation:

PHIL: But you finished your degree. Eventually.

NEMO: Yes.

PHIL: And you aren't tempted to go back to Montréal?

NEMO: Sometimes, for all the help people give you, you're so ashamed of the things you've done and person you've become, you can't confide in them. Sometimes you have been damaged too much to seek the company of people who look at you, even in a kind way. It's easier just to leave the past behind and transform entirely.

NEMO: Did Moncharmin mention Meg Giry in his memoirs?

PHIL: I don't think he did. The thing about Armand Moncharmin . . .

NEMO: What?

PHIL: Well, if you look at managers of the Paris Opera in the building built by Charles Garnier, last quarter of the nineteenth century, you've got a pretty even split between competent administrators and artistic types, with Pedro Gailhard being one of the exceptions—a singer and also such a good manager that he keeps coming back, all through the 1880s and right up until 1908.

NEMO: Whereas Moncharmin . . . ?

PHIL: Had money and had worked a little as a music critic for *The Echo*. Which is the newspaper that Gaston Leroux's younger brother, Jo, worked for.

NEMO: Oh really? That's a, that's a connection. Gaston Leroux. Coming back into the frame.

PHIL: Yes, but in and of itself it's not very meaningful.

NEMO: *The Echo* held more relevance than we first thought. Catalogued back issues led me to a short piece in the gossip columns.

NEMO: I called up Phil to tell him about it.

[Beeping.]

COMPUTER VOICE: Your call cannot be connected. Goodbye.

[ALICJA walks into the room.]

ALICJA: *Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?* [What's going on?]

NEMO: Just trying to get hold of Phil to tell him about a new discovery I made.

[ALICJA sighs.]

NEMO: What's that supposed to mean?

ALICJA: Just that you've called him four times today.

NEMO: No, I haven't.

ALICJA: And that's just while I've been home.

NEMO: Yeah, well, I'm working on something . . .

ALICJA: Everything about you changes when you talk about him.

NEMO: What do you mean?

ALICJA: I'm just saying.

[She walks off.]

NEMO: I did eventually get hold of Phil. He agreed the piece was interesting—it mentioned Christine disappeared for two weeks after the performance of *Faust* and speculated on her engagement to Raoul. But it all remained inconclusive.

NEMO: This BBC interview had been interesting, but many things had still not been resolved. I went back to the final Volta Cylinder discovered with the Gramophone recordings buried underneath the Palais Garnier, the one I had not yet digitized and was being held, somewhat unofficially, in my old office in Rez-de-jardin.

NEMO: I had been warned not to digitize this recording while working for the Palais Garnier because it had been in such a state of degradation, even attempting to digitize it could destroy it. But I made the decision to try anyway. Maybe it would hold the key to all the mysteries.

[Dialling tone.]

NEMO: I don't know if you remember Hakim from my office at the BnF, but I called him to see if he'd be willing to digitize it for me.

Phone conversation:

HAKIM: *Alors, ça c'est pour ton podcast?* [This is for your podcast?]

NEMO: *Oui*, Hakim.

HAKIM: Okay, okay. I'll speak *en anglais*. [in English]

NEMO: So *what* happened to the cylinder?

HAKIM: I . . . *pardonne-moi, si te plaît*. [Forgive me, please.]

NEMO: *What* happened?

HAKIM: Basically, um, I started listening to your podcast, *tu vois?* [Right?] And . . . I saw that cylinder still in your office and I . . . I just wanted to help. But I got in a lot of . . . bother.

NEMO: Bother? Why?

HAKIM: I got in . . . trouble, for breaking the cylinder playback device. The cylinder is still intact. *T'n'inquiete pas, eh?* [Don't worry.] I tried scanning it digitally. But, *tu sais, l'ordinateur était foutu, quoi.* [The computer was f*cked.]

NEMO: Hakim . . .

HAKIM: *Ah pardonne-moi.* [Forgive me.] Yeah, sorry. That cylinder has caused a lot of damage, you know? I am never touching it again, and neither should you. It almost seems like it's cursed.

NEMO: What do you mean?

HAKIM: Ah! *Tu sais, maudite!* [You know, cursed!]

PHIL: (on phone) I don't believe in curses.

[Shattered outro music]

NEMO: You've been listening to *The Shattered Podcast*. Catch us next time.

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.
