

SHATTERED

BY LESSER OF 2 WEEVILS – 2022

Episode 13

[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?

NEMO: I debated for a long time whether to release the previous episode as it stood, but I felt a commitment to revealing the truth, as I have throughout this project. I’m no longer in communication with Phil Donan, but for any listeners who are continuing to follow the *Shattered Podcast*, I won’t condone any negative comments. About Phil, anyway. If you have a problem with me, then just don’t listen. It’s that easy. What’s done is done. (sighs) A sympathetic listener has written to say that:

PODCAST LISTENER: I believe you! I, I, I, know you’ve seen the missing prints of the 1916 *Das Phantom der Oper!* Really, really, I do! An’, an’, I think I know who left you that harassing phone message!

NEMO: Let’s listen to that message again.

DUDE C: This message is for the person known as Nemo. You’ve been playing this game long enough. Now is the time to cut your losses and go. This is no joke. Your interventions have already caused enough damage. This is your last warning.

NEMO: The listener didn’t want to be identified, and after what’s happened so far, I don’t blame them. The fragment they discussed with me pertains to Gaston Leroux, the journalist who was supposed to have interviewed the Daroghah of Mazandaran as the basis for *Das Phantom der Oper*.

PODCAST LISTENER 3: This is what Leroux wrote! That there was a shade beneath the Palais Garnier who was both “interesting and useful” and whose identity was a matter of state secrets.

NEMO: The listener, therefore, believes that this person, identified in 1909 . . . has left me a voicemail. I also received an e-mail from Laila Lim. She wasn’t interested in speaking on Skype, but she did say this: “I understand completely why you are no longer in contact with Phil Donan. I have also severed contact with him. However, I am still interested in the outcome of the Shattered mystery. I’ve been sent a link to a 1981 BBC radio program that may be useful and the BBC has given you permission to play it on the podcast.” Thank you, Laila. Let’s play this now.

[Transcription of radio broadcast on tape cassette. Cheerful early 1980s theme music.]

SUE: *Curtain Up* on the world of arts and entertainment, presented by Baines Anfield. Today, we go back in time to the Belle Époque.

[The bells of Notre-Dame-de-Paris and street noise.]

BAINES ANFIELD: Ah, Paris, the City of Love. In 1881, an Empire at the height of its power and a society at the height of its cultural influence.

[Music from an opera, *Roméo et Juliette*, by Charles Gounod.]

BAINES ANFIELD: The home of Rodin, Toulouse-Lautrec, Manet, Monet, and Renoir. Everywhere could be heard music: the music of Charles Gounod, Camille Saint-Saëns, Jules Massenet, Léo Délibes . . . It was also the era of the Decadents and the Symbolist poets, like Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud.

READER: “*Avec les fleurs, avec les femmes,*

Avec l’absinthe, avec le feu,

On peut se divertir un peu,

Jouer son rôle en quelque drame.”

[With the flowers, with the women,

With the absinthe, with the fire,

We can amuse ourselves a little,

Playing our role in this drama.]

BAINES: Nostalgically painted as a dazzling mirage of frivolity and the naughty “demi-monde” of the Moulin Rouge, the Belle Époque coincided with the middle of the Third Republic: a time of economic growth as well as recessions, suspicions and social conservatism. Then, as now, one could sit in a café and read the news in *L'Époque*.

One hundred years ago today, a curious incident recorded in the pages of a Parisian newspaper ran with the following headline: *Deux cent milles kilos sur la tête d'une concière!*

[Phonograph recording from another Gounod opera, *Faust*.]

BAINES: Two thousand kilos on the head of a concierge was the headline. Although, in reality, the chandelier in question weighed seven tons. This headline refers to the tragic and unexplained death of Madame Clothilde Clemence when the spectacular chandelier fell from the ceiling of the Paris Opera House, crushing Madame Clemence and injuring dozens of others, including musicians in the orchestra and Madame Clemence's husband and brother. This was during the performance of Charles Gounod's opera *Faust* with the diva Carlotta Peralta Vasquez singing the role of Marguerite. Some fifteen years later, Rosa Carron was also singing at the Paris Opera, this time in a forgotten oeuvre called *Hellé* by Alphonse Duvernoy, when an electrical fire in the attic melted one of the cables holding the chandelier counterweight. The counterweight plummeted down, also killing another concierge, the 56-year-old Madame Chomette, of 7, rue Rochechouart.

[The bells of Notre-Dame-de-Paris and street noise.]

BAINES: These days, the chandelier is suspended beneath a false ceiling painted by Marc Chagall, and the opera patrons have turned into ballet aficionados. Still, one can't help wondering what this opera house has against concierges. Accidents were, of course, inevitable; a previous opera house on the Rue le Peletier burnt down in 1873. Fire was such a preoccupation that open tanks of water were kept on the Opera roof. During the summer, the boys in the corps de ballet would learn to swim here. While the accident that caused the counterweight to plummet into the audience demonstrated some of pitfalls of the new lighting system, electricity, it was never determined what caused the death of Madame Clemence in 1881.

[“Avant de quitter les lieux,” a song sung by a baritone, from Gounod's *Faust*.]

BAINES: At the time, the Paris Opera supported a remarkable self-sufficient society, from the *foyer de la danse* to the *escalier des abonnés*. The *foyer de la danse*, an incredibly opulent space with mirrors for the dancers to wait between cues, was also where Opera patrons met to talk business or to meet and admire the young women of the opera. Many of

these patrons were rich and famous, coming from some of the top families in French society. They might well mix with Sarah Bernhardt and the luminaries of the Ballets Russes. Bernhardt's excesses were well-known, with more than fourteen dogs and cats, some of whom she travelled with, insisting they receive their own suites in hotels. However, she was symptomatic of a hedonistic age. In 1901, 60,000 people were engaged in dressmaking in Paris. Three hundred million birds a year were killed for hats and other costume ornaments. Extraordinary behavior was the clear result of extraordinary largesse.

["Ah je ris," a song sung by a soprano, from Gounod's *Faust*.]

BAINES: While the men of Parisian society might well be carrying on dangerous duels, women of the theatre were at risk from more than chandelier counterweights. A 1903 edition of the *Paris Herald* noted that singer Madame Emma Calvé could not appear in Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust* due to an overdose of the poison aconite.

Writing some thirty years after the chandelier incident, journalist Gaston Leroux, creator of detective Joseph Rouletabille, had some ideas:

ACTOR READING AS LEROUX: Now, I have it on good authority that this mishap was not perpetrated by the mischievous opera ghost, mentioned in passing by Armand Moncharmin, but by someone altogether more of flesh and blood. He was a composer and a musician, a skilled craftsman, and a man of eccentric, not to say, mysterious habits.

BAINES: As this is very much in the vein of Leroux's blood-and-thunder thrillers, we must let him have his joke.

[Applause from the audience in the historic recording.]

SUE: Thank you, Baines. And we heard from the MIT Symphony Orchestra, the Victor Opera Trio, and the Boston Opera, in a series of historical—

[Disruptive white noise. Magnetic tape recording]

DUDE C: For the purposes of this recording, could you please confirm your name?

CHRISTINE: My name is Christine Daaé.

DUDE C: How long have you been living in London?

CHRISTINE: Since 1939.

DUDE C: And how did you come to be living here?

CHRISTINE: My old friend the Baroness de Castelot-Barbezac invited me, and I, I had the help of the Duchess of Zurich. I sang at the salon of her mother. Under the circumstances, I thought it was a good idea.

DUDE C: You survived the war.

CHRISTINE: Yes.

DUDE C: The Baroness was not so lucky.

CHRISTINE: *Who are you?*

DUDE C: I was never able to interview the Baroness, but I did interview someone named Ebrahim Amir Hosein'ali Khan on the Rue de Rivoli in 1897.

CHRISTINE: Khan? That's not the name of the man—

DUDE C: Who you knew as the Persian? Yes?

CHRISTINE: He can't still be living!

DUDE C: No, he is long gone.

CHRISTINE: If you spoke to him in 1897, and you're interviewing me, then—?

[The sound of a Berliner disc being removed from its sleeve and placed on a turntable.]

DUDE C: You never remarried, after the death of your husband?

CHRISTINE: No.

[A Gramophone recording of young Christine singing, accompanied by piano.]

DUDE C: Do you recognize this piece of music?

CHRISTINE: Yes, it's something I sang a long time ago. Raoul thought it might make a bit of money. We didn't really know how musical recording would catch on, in those days. If I had, I would have done what Caruso and Patti and Tetrazinni did and—

[He takes the record off the turntable and breaks it.]

CHRISTINE: How could you do that?! Oh, what have you done?

DUDE C: Who wrote that music?

CHRISTINE: Erik did! How could you?!

DUDE C: Who was Erik?

CHRISTINE: What do you mean, who was Erik?! You must know, if you were there!!

DUDE C: I was there, and I read the statement of Hosein'ali Khan—the Persian to you—his statement to the police, who ignored it.

CHRISTINE: Regarding the death of Raoul's brother?

DUDE C: I spoke to the Daroghah of Mazandaran. And you and he keep defending him. This monster! This demon! What did he call him—trap-door lover?

CHRISTINE: If you've heard his music and you've spoken to the Persian, how can you call him a monster?

DUDE C: When was the last time you saw Erik?

CHRISTINE: Alive or dead?

DUDE C: Alive.

CHRISTINE: It was . . . the night of *Faust* . . . so many years ago, when I went missing from the stage. It was a terrible night. And . . . I had the choice, to turn the grasshopper or the scorpion. I didn't really understand then, but the whole opera house was in danger. "You're going to give them the gift of life," he said—he was raving—"all those Parisians above us." We were in his house on the lake, beneath the Opera. There were these . . . rather sinister, but rather beautiful figurines, in ebony boxes. A grasshopper and a scorpion. "You're going to turn the scorpion," he kept raving, "and wedding bells will ring for us." He kept telling me that the scorpion would send us to heaven: the heaven of our marriage. And . . . and . . . I turned the scorpion. And I did a lot of praying. . . . And I hadn't died, nor had Raoul or the Persian or . . . the building hadn't blown up. It was immense, and it was insane . . . oh, he was so in love! Insane . . . tragic . . .

DUDE C: Why the grasshopper and the scorpion?

CHRISTINE: I wondered that for a long time myself. Then my husband was reading the Bible, the Book of Revelations. "And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air was darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power."

DUDE C: I have something that belongs to you.

[Material rustles.]

CHRISTINE: My—my gloves! Erik—Erik kept them?

DUDE C: Yes.

CHRISTINE: So you, you who call him a monster, you actually have some . . . sympathy?

DUDE C: What I am interested in, Comtesse, is the truth.

CHRISTINE: I have something . . . that might help you . . . establish the truth. But I don't know if I should give it to you.

DUDE C: Why not?

CHRISTINE: My understanding, from your first telephone call to this moment, is that you want to despoil Erik's legacy from the face of the Earth.

DUDE C: Not his legacy. Just his music.

CHRISTINE: But *why*?

DUDE C: He made sound recordings, he wrote music. Quite rightly, as you have said, his soul resides in these things.

CHRISTINE: What interest do you have in it?

DUDE C: How was the music smuggled out?

CHRISTINE: You asked about the last time I saw him. He was dead. I had read in *L'Époque*: Erik is dead. I returned to the Opera, as I had promised. I buried him. I also arranged for those phonographs he made to be placed in the urn, with the Gramophones.

DUDE C: Without the knowledge of your husband?

CHRISTINE: With the help of the Persian. But, no, Raoul knew nothing about it.

DUDE C: You realize what this means, that *Don Juan* is not meant for human ears? When you say, Comtesse, that the last time you saw Erik was when you buried him, that is not quite true, is it?

[CHRISTINE opens a drawer. She takes out a record and places it on the record player. She lifts the arm and begins playing it. It is the soloist from the parléphon singing the song from the 1906 church organ Gramophone disc.]

CHRISTINE: What all the supernumeraries and wardrobe mistresses and bookkeepers in the Opera didn't realize is that what they thought was a ghost was flesh and blood. But after he died . . . I'm rather frightened to go on.

DUDE C: I met your husband. I warned him.

CHRISTINE: You spoke to Raoul?

DUDE C: I told him in no uncertain terms the danger that would befall not only you and your family but the whole human race if recordings of Erik's music continued to be heard. The more who heard, the stronger his spirit would be. And it was not a happy spirit, it was a vengeful spirit.

CHRISTINE: But *why*? I had consented to be his living wife!

DUDE C: Yes, and from what Hosein'ali Khan told me, he died a happy man, as happy as that murderous wretch could be. But dying happy means he does not wish to be disturbed. And each time that music is played and heard, each time his voice is heard from beyond the grave, his wickedness grows in power. As for myself, I have no name and no identity. I used to serve the French government, but now I ensure that immortal means of doom do not threaten the world.

[The recording ends abruptly.]

PHIL: 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?

To find out, we have to go back much further, to the 1870s, when a gifted but tragic genius, disfigured from birth, became interested in early sound recording. If music and sound were such an important part of his life, as it seems was the case, then it's only natural that he should have picked up where Charles Cros left off. From his domain in the Paris Opera, where he kept the management to ransom by pretending to be a ghost, he sought to extend the power of recording further. These aims ultimately failed, but brought him to the attention of Hosein'ali Khan, his comrade-in-arms from Mazandaran in Persia, who had once saved his life.

Some time in the early 1880s, Erik fell in love, with Christine Daaé, a Swedish soprano, who was already in love with Raoul de Chagny, a French aristocrat. This set in motion an awful series of events that culminated in the death of Raoul's brother Count Philippe, who himself had dabbled in sound recording.

By the time the living voices were interred in 1907, Erik had been dead for more than a decade, and Hosein'ali Khan's effects had come under the protection of his servant, Darius, who had brought them with him when he emigrated to the United States. Christine Daaé was still in possession of some of Erik's music, some of which she gave to her old friend Meg Giry who quietly passed them off as her own creations to make ends meet. When Meg Giry became the Baroness de Castelot-Barbezac, she embraced her new identity and denied the piece of her past that connected her with the Paris Opera.

More than one hundred years later, a brilliant young sound engineer and recordist came to Paris and was fascinated by Erik's genius. After suffering a nervous breakdown, Heather Brown—known to most of her friends as Nemo—walked out of her friend's apartment in Porte de Versailles and disappeared. Of course, what most likely happened—and what the French police chose to tell her parents—is that she returned to her ex-boyfriend, Joel, the only person, she said, who she could relate to like she used to relate to her brother. Heather's parents told me later that Patrick—her brother—died in a car accident. He was driving, and this Joel was in that car, too. Patrick, Heather's parents said, had been a well-adjusted, normal child, though increasingly as Heather stayed away in Montréal studying, his self-confidence crumbled. He hadn't been an angel, exactly, but he turned to alcohol, which ultimately figured in the crash that killed him. Heather . . . it seems . . . never recovered from the loss.

Besides her notes and the materials for the podcast, the only belongings that were on her desk after she disappeared was the reel-to-reel recording you've just heard. There's a date in masking tape on the side of the canister—1953—although this is difficult to verify. Where did it come from? If the so-called Shade has been destroying evidence of Erik's music and existence, as implied in that recording and as Heather believed, why did he leave that recording intact?

With some help on the technical side, I prepared these recordings initially for Heather's parents, who came from Toronto after their daughter never returned home.

I left the podcast online as a testament to Heather's great curiosity and determination. People have since asked me if I thought Nemo was crazy. Well, the last few things she said did have the ring of the far-fetched about them. *Das Phantom der Oper* on YouTube. Threatening voicemail messages. A dead deformed twisted genius singing to her from the static and glitch of old recordings. It seems crazy—

--but . . . I've started hearing Erik, too.

Until what was stolen from his burial is returned, or until the Shade—if he actually exists—is able to confront Erik, I fear I always will be haunted by him. I will always be hearing this voice in my head. Maybe that’s what drove Nemo over the edge. The beautiful but terrible music. Sad and ultimately tragic. But is it irredeemable?

If I could speak to Heather, I would apologize for how I behaved, when I didn’t believe her, when I lied to her. I would like to go back in time and be straight with her. It was never my intention to hurt her. It was mainly cowardice on my part, failing to take responsibility. But I’m doing that now. At least, I’m trying to. I’m trying to make amends. Gaston Leroux, when he interviewed the Persian, the Persian said something about Erik. He wrote, “Erik had a heart great enough to hold the empire of the world.” If only I had that, I could have used it to help Nemo.

The final Volta Lab phonograph, the one the elderly Christine Daaé mentioned in that reel-to-reel recording, has never been played, as far as we know. I’ve left it in the care of the bibliothèque-musée at the Palais Garnier, and by that token probably within the power of the Shade. However, I would not be surprised if it appeared one day, digitized, on the Internet; a lot of things seem to.

This is Phil Donan, and this is the last—ever—*Shattered Podcast*.

[Erik and Christine sing a duet accompanied by piano, initially on phonograph recording, then live.]

[Shattered end title music]

End credits:

Shattered was written by Leslie McMurtry, inspired by the novel *Le Fantôme de l’Opéra* by Gaston Leroux. Josie Eli Herman played Nemo, and David Sillars played Phil Donan. Natalie Heng played Laila Lim and Professor Shahzad. Dustin Jackson was played by Orien “Mayborne” Thompson. The Shade and Michael Charles were played by Michael Herman. Sebastian Touray played Hakim, Herb, and Khan. Rod Henderson was Simeon Entwhistle, and Vin Ernst was Alicja. Erik was voiced by David Ault and sung by Matt Pouchin. Christine Daaé was voiced by Katherine Wasserlein and sung by Anna McCready. Meg Giry, the Baroness de Castelot-Barbezac, was Laura Frey. Dani Jubilee was played by Kathleen Li. Fiona Thraille was Dr Amelia Docherty. Will de Renzy-Martin played Count Philippe and the BBC Announcer. Emma Carter was the Audiobook Reader, and Aditya Swaminathan, Astrid

López, and Jamie Beckwith were the Podcast Listeners. Other parts were played by members of the cast.

Music was by Katharine Seaton and Robert Sholl. Historical keyboard recordings were made on a 1900 Steinway & Sons piano in the Royal Academy of Music Piano Museum in London. Additional music was by the Boston Opera House, “Vin ou Bière” from *Faust* broadcast on 6 April 1940, used under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial license 4.0 from LiberLiber.Italia, *Roméo et Juliette* by the MIT Symphony Orchestra used under a Creative Commons Attribution License, and the Prison Scene from *Faust* by the Victor Opera Trio, from the Free Music Archive Antique Phonograph Music Program. Peter Adamson digitized Berliner disc 660 *Les Baisers Waltz* by The Municipal Orchestra, London, from 21 November 1900.

Actuality and sound effects were recorded and created by Leslie McMurtry, Jamie Beckwith, Katharine Seaton, Adam Fowler, with the following under a Creative Commons 0 license, Walter Odington, Thaighaudio, Vendarro, and Mxsmanic from FreeSound.org. Additional royalty free sound effects were by Fesliyan Studios. Thanks to Peter Adamson, Melissa Beattie, Robert Beckwith, Esperanza Beckwith-Wilches, Liz Beckwith-Wilches, Fiona N. Cashell, Simon Heighes, Patricia Jephson, Fatemeh Sani Pour, and Jordan Walters. This podcast could not have been made without the generous support of the City of London Phonograph and Gramophone Society, Brian Baker, Jamie Beckwith, Tony Cross, Carl and Joanne Donsbach, Will Forbes, Adam Fowler, Steven Sautter, Brian Williams, Carol Renfro, Illene Renfro, and Sally Renfro. *Shattered* is dedicated to the memory of Walter Larry McMurtry. *Shattered* was directed and produced by Leslie McMurtry and was a Lesser of 2 Weevils production 2022.

ERIK: (laughs madly) *Mon Don Juan, à moi, brûle, et, cependant, il n'est point foudroyé par le feu du ciel!* [My *Don Juan* burns and yet it is not set alight by fire from heaven!]