

**The indication of rotation speed on the labels of the Soc. Nazionale del  
"Grammofono" records in the ICBSA archives**  
(Massimiliano Lopez)

PART TWO

"78 RPM": "His Master's Voice" recordings are made to be played at a speed of 78 RPM, and no deviation should be made from this rule unless a special speed is marked after the record reference in the catalog. The correct speed determines pitch, tone, and tempo, and only by paying close attention to this point can you ensure that you hear these elements as they actually were while they were being recorded.

Turntables should be tested for speed from time to time. This can be done instantaneously by means of the patented "His Master's Voice" speed tester.

To conclude this brief reflection on a technological aspect of the history of reproduction that should contribute to the correct preservation of historical record collections in the archives, let's quickly return to the analysis of the ICBSA documents from which we started our discussion.

We have noted that the presence or absence of the indication of rotation speed, in the case of the Società Nazionale del "Grammofono", seems to coincide with its two historical phases of life. However, some sporadic testimonies of the first phase seem to be exceptions to the general trend. In only four cases, among the two hundred examined, the record labels have the rotation speed printed on the right side. This anomaly may depend on various factors, the first and most significant of which is the chronological data: it is quite likely that the company, as the Italian subsidiary of the English Gramophone, decided to adopt the typographical changes that occurred after 1922 with the explicit adoption of the 78 rpm standard (change of graphic organization of the label, introduction of the new Series represented by capital letters followed by a number, etc.). Again, the publication of the Historical Catalogue n.2 confirms the need for a new "series" in which the speed data is essential.

The images below belong to both cases described above: the disc "Gramophone" DB 978 containing the Sonata al chiaro di luna performed by Harold Bauer is affected by the new graphic layout of the label that provides the disappearance of the old partitions in the lower part, the introduction of the new serial number (it is still present, although in brackets and on the left, the old editorial number of the English edition: 05938) and the addition of the indication of rotation speed; the disc "Gramophone" DB 129, containing two interpretations of Enrico Caruso, belongs instead to that group of recordings grouped within the Historical Catalogue no. 2 published in 1925, as is clear from the inscription placed in an arc between DISCO "GRAMMOFONO" and the logo: "This disc is included in catalogue no. 2 which contains records of special historical interest not included in the general catalogue".



Although the record belongs to the production of the Società Nazionale del "Grammofono" (1912-early 1927), it bears the indication of the rotation speed, as was customary in the labels of the Società Anonima Nazionale del "Grammofono" (1927-1937). These characteristics make it likely that this record dates from the last five years of production of the SN del "Grammofono". The record is among those suppressed in the catalogue of 1 October 1934.

(ICBSA 259884)



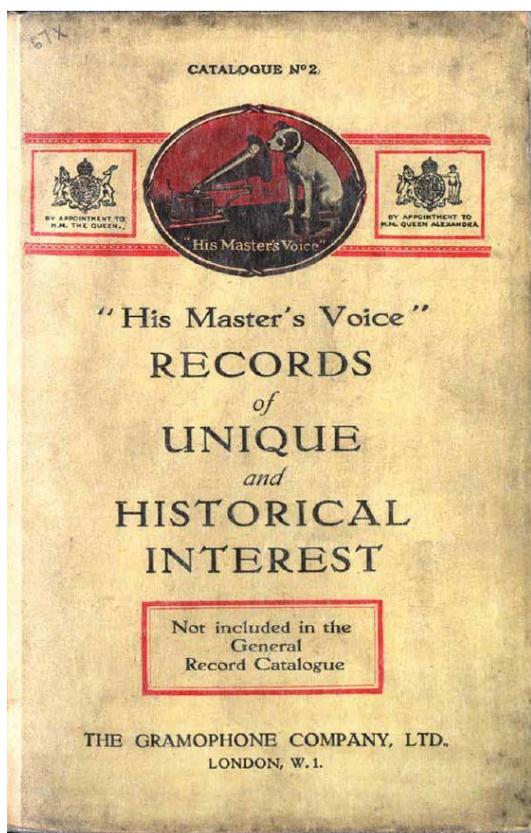
Red label disc of the "National Gramophone Society" DB 129 (side a) belongs to the series of engravings listed in the Historical Catalogue no.2. Therefore, although it belongs to the production of the National Gramophone Company (1912-early 1927), it can be dated between 1925 and early 1927. The speed of rotation at 78 rpm is not due to a standard, but is the original speed adopted in the recording made by Enrico Caruso in 1906 (see Historical Catalogue no. 2).

(ICBSA 7377)

In this last disc it is interesting to note that there is a contradiction between the indications offered on the two sides of the disc and the Historical Catalogue: the side containing the aria Spirto gentil taken from "La Favorita" is consistently reported at 78 rpm both on the label and in the catalogue; the romanza by Francesco Paolo Tosti Ideale is instead recorded, according to the catalogue, at 80 rpm while the label has stamped "Giri 78".



Red label disc from the Soc. Naz. del "Grammofono" DB 129 (side b). The speed of rotation at 78 rpm does not correspond to the original speed of 80 rpm adopted in the recording made by Enrico Caruso in 1906 and reported in the Historical Catalogue (ICBSA 7377)



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	Date Recorded	No.	Size	Label
ENRICO CARUSO—continued.				
Di quella pira (TROVATORE—Verdi) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1910	DA 113	10 Red
Lasciati amar (Leoncavallo) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1913		
Donna e mobile, La (RICCOLETTO—Verdi) <i>In Italian</i>	(82)	1910	DA 561	10 Red
Ora e per sempre addio (OTELLO—Verdi) <i>In Italian</i>	(81)	1910		
Fenesta c'è lucie e mo' non luce (Neapolitan Song) <i>In Neapolitan</i>	(78)	1913	DB 140	12 Red
Trieste ritorno—Romanza (Barthelémy) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1906		
Ideale (Romanza) (Tosti) <i>In Italian</i>	(80)	1906	DB 129	12 Red
Spirto gentil (FAVORITA—Donizetti) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1906		
In terra solo (DON SERASTIANO—Donizetti) <i>In Italian</i>	(82)	1907		
Un di all' azzurro, spazio guardai profondo (ANDREA CHIENIER—Giordano) <i>In Italian</i>	(82)	1907	DB 700	12 Red
Eternamente (Mascheroni) <i>In Italian</i>	(81)	1911	DB 121	12 Red
Mandella mia (Neapolitan Song) (Valente) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1913		
La mia canzone (Tosti) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(75)	1903	DA 548	10 Red
Non t'amo piu (Denza) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(75)	1902		
Mattinata (Leoncavallo) <i>In Italian with piano acc. by composer</i>	(75)	1902	DA 546	10 Red
Vesti la giubba (PAGLIACCI—Leoncavallo) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(75)	1902		
No, non chiuder gli occhi vaghi (GERMANIA—Franchetti) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1909	DA 543	10 Red
Studenti udite (GERMANIA—Franchetti) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1909		
No, non chiuder gli occhi vaghi (GERMANIA—Franchetti) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(75)	1902	DA 544	10 Red
Studenti udite (GERMANIA—Franchetti) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(75)	1902		
O dolce incanto (Il sogno) (MANON—Missenet) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(75)	1902	52345	10 Red (Single-sided)
O Lola, ch' ai di latti la cammisa (CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA—Mascagni) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(74)	1902	DA 545	10 Red
Viva il vino spumeggiante (CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA—Mascagni) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(77)	1903		
Parmi veder le lagrime (RICCOLETTO—Verdi) <i>In Italian</i>	(80)	1911		
Una furtiva lagrima (ELISIR D' AMORE—Donizetti) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1911	DB 126	12 Red
Parted (Tosti) <i>In English</i>	(78)	1912	DA 118	10 Red
Pour un baiser (Tosti) <i>In French</i>	(82)	1909		
Cielo e mar l' etero velo splende come un santo allere (GIOCONDA—Ponchielli) <i>In Italian</i>	(81)	1911		
Lolita—Serenata Española (Buzzi-Peccia) <i>In Spanish</i>	(81)	1908	DB 696	12 Red

For Prices of Records see page 2.

Cover and page 7 of "His Master's Voice" Records of Unique and Historical Interest, the Historical Catalogue n.2 of the English company The Gramophone Co. Ltd in which 428 recordings are reported from 1900 to 1924.

As you can see in the image on the right, the sound documents, in this case organized by performer, show, in addition to the title, the original rotation speed of the recording and the year of recording.

The fourth disc on this page is the one that contains the recordings of Spirto gentil and Ideale made by Enrico Caruso in 1906 at 80 and 78 rpm

To conclude this brief examination on the practice of reporting the rotation speed along with the discographic information, it will be appropriate to remember that this practice is present in the catalogs of Gramophone - His Master's Voice since 1907, placing the information at the end of the description of the disc:

**"RED LABEL" GRAMOPHONE RECORDS.**



**CAV. ENRICO CARUSO.**  
 Caruso is one of those men, the title of which seems to have been bestowed by Lord Byron when he declared that one has never seen his equal in the world before. His singing is so good that he has a special title in Italy, "Il Re del Tenore", and is generally recognized as the greatest singer of his time. He has been the object of much admiration, being sung in the best of the world. He has been the object of much admiration, being sung in the best of the world. He has been the object of much admiration, being sung in the best of the world.

A.S. 2524 "Quena o quela," from "Rigoletto," by Verdi.	A.S. 2528 "Studenti udite," from "Germania," by Franchetti.
A.S. 2525 "E Dogno," from "Masseo," by Mascagni.	A.S. 2529 "Ciclo e Mei," from "Giacinta," (Puccini).
A.S. 2526 "Die Arien lagima," from "L'Idolo d'Amore," by Giuseppe Tomasi.	A.S. 2530 "La Sicilia," from "Cavalleria Rusticana," (Mascagni).
A.S. 2527 "Quanto sul passo nostro," from "Medea," by Arrigo Boito.	A.S. 2531 "Veni la gloria," from "Pagliacci," (Leoncavallo).
A.S. 2528 "Ist' amari dei panti," from "Medea," by Arrigo Boito.	A.S. 2532 "Non fimo più," (Della).
A.S. 2529 "Etenno lo stillo," from "Enea," by Puccini.	A.S. 2533 "La Mia Canzone," (Finzi).
A.S. 2530 "Serenata," from "Ene," by Mascagni.	A.S. 2534 "No più stelle in mi della regina," from "Adriano Lecocquer," (Clés).
A.S. 2531 "Colore Aida, divisa Aida," from "Aida," by Verdi.	A.S. 2535 "Astor e Vesta," from "Fedora," (U. Giardino).
A.S. 2532 "No san chidde gli occhi nelli," from "Germania," by Franchetti.	A.S. 2536 "Lena Felici"

BY APPOINTMENT TO  
**NEW GRAMOPHONE RECORDS**  
 NOVEMBER 1907



**HARRODS, LTD.,**  
 Piano Department,  
 Brompton Road, S.W.

NEW . . . *November, 1907.*

**GRAMOPHONE RECORDS**

**10-in., 5s. each; 12-in., 7s. 6d. each.**

**BANDS.**

**The Band of H.M. Coldstream Guards.**  
 Conducted by Lieut. Mackenzie Rogan.  
 10-inch records. 8s.

G.C. 2-251 *Himmeseke* DVOŘAK  
*Poco lento e grazioso.*



This delightful little piece by the late Bohemian composer was first published as a vocal solo in the hands of Kreisler and Miss Marie Hall. Its tender charm of melody and sentiment are quite irresistible and the rendering is as dainty as one could wish. (Speed 79)

G.C. 2-250 *Carillonneur* BORLAND  
 A pretty waltz movement, the principal theme being played on bell, the piece containing other interesting bell effects. (Speed 79)

G.C. 2-247 *Les Cloches Valse* PARTRIDGE  
 Also a full waltz, a very animated and elaborate example of unalloyed effectiveness. (Speed 79)

Red Label Gramophone Records catalog of 1904, p. 8  
 The discographical information shows only the disc's editorial number and title.

His Master's Voice, New Catalogue November 1907, cover and p. 3  
 In this catalog appears, placed between parentheses and after the other discographic data, the speed of rotation adopted during the recording with the obvious purpose of promoting a correct listening.

This practice, which is normally used for ordinary productions, is also employed, and perhaps even more so, for "Celebrity Records":

**CARUSO'S**  
 New GRAMOPHONE Records

12-inch record, 12s. 6d. each.

G.C. 2-05208 *Oh tu che regno in gli angeli* (Thou Heavenly Chorus) ("La Forza del Destino") VERDI  
 A powerful appeal to heaven, introducing an impassioned melody with which Caruso renders with magnificent declamatory effect. After some fervid passages in the nature of more pathetic ones it struck with a beautiful melodic movement, culminating in a rapid gradation of notes. The whole of the great aria lends itself to the exhibition of Caruso's style and expansion in every phase, and it undoubtedly one of the finest Gramophone records he has made. (Speed 81.)



10-inch record, 8s. 6d. each.

G.C. 7-52003 *Magie Note* (Magic Note) GOLDMARK  
 A slow touching melody, surcharged with deep feeling, develops gradually until one of those intense and passionate climaxes is reached, delivered by Caruso with his usual fire and brilliancy. The most dramatic finish, reaching to high C, is sustained by a use of the vocal cord, and adds another to the already numerous magnificent Gramophone records made by this matchless artist. (Speed 82.)

**NEW CELEBRITY RECORDS.**

**CAV. E. CARUSO (Tenor).**  
 10-inch records, 8s. 6d. each.

7-52013 *Studenti Udite* ("Germania") Franchetti  
 Baron Franchetti's "Germania" was first produced at La Scala in 1902, and its success there has been generally repeated, it being performed at Covent Garden upon the occasion of a recent State visit of the Kaiser. The story deals with a period when Germany was growing under the heel of Napoleon, and the work reflects the national aspirations which in that era filled the hearts of the youths of the Fatherland. "Studenti Udite" is the eloquent appeal of Frederico, the student, to his comrades after the death of one of their number. In the performance of this number Caruso has been stirred by the elevated sentiments to give a rousing and inspired utterance to this fine piece of declamation. A martial motive which seems to be associated with the German movement is twice heard, once upon the phrase: "Chi muore per la patria," and again at the "La la, Vincola o il Nallo."  
 The enthusiasm of the singer increases as the song proceeds, until the full power of this magnificent tenor is revealed at the glorious anthem-like conclusion. (Speed 81.)

7-52014 *Non chiuder*, "Germania" Franchetti  
 The love story interwoven with this fine national drama is not of an altogether idealistic type, but deals with the relationship of the girl Rieke and one of the students in the absence of her lover, Frederico. Upon the return of the latter, Rieke is pensive and wishes to confess her unfaithfulness, while Frederico, oblivious of the girl's inward misgivings, pours into her ears the post-op story of his love. "Non chiuder" is indeed a typical love song, melodious in character and easy to follow, and is sung with a marvellous evenness of voice and sustained beauty from the first note to the last. There is an expressive passage at the close of the short introductory recitative, while Caruso's fine top A on the first phrase of the air proper at once attracts attention. The softer colouring of the closing "amor" is also worthy of note, as it brings this graceful solo to a charming and tender conclusion. (Speed 81.)

**USE ONLY GRAMOPHONE NEEDLES,**  
 sold in Metal Boxes, bearing our Trade Mark,  
 "HIS MASTER'S VOICE."

His Master's Voice, Novelty Catalogue January and October 1910, pp. 6 and 7

“His Master’s Voice”

**Celebrity Records**

**Signor CARUSO (Tenor).**  
12-inch record, 12s. 6d.  
(with orchestral accompaniment)

**2-032007** *Il fior che avevi a me* (“Carmen”) *Bizet*

**T**HE present set of Caruso records have been made at a favourable moment when this great tenor was in exceptionally fine voice, since they seem to combine the lighter lyrical quality of his earlier performances with the resonance and power belonging to his riper days. All will remember that this air is sung by José as he draws a rose from his breast which has been flung at him by Carmen, and the song is an exquisite example of Bizet’s genius. Its delicate character is brought out by Caruso with wonderful artistic skill, in the grace and savoury with which he gives the opening line. The performance, however, soon broadens out as the passion of the song deepens, from the *antennando* through the declamatory passages on to the “*Tu riviera Carmen.*” By the time we reach the concluding lines

“*Che ti basto ad ah mostrarti.*”

we hear the full power of the magnificent voice of the greatest of all tenors, and realise what a monumental performance this is, not only in respect to its vocal grandeur, but also because of the artistic balance with which the whole song is delivered. (*Speed 81.*)

*Published by His Master’s Voice & Co.*



Signor Caruso



You know it by this  
The Master’s Voice

His Master's Voice, New Catalogue September 1911, p. 12

“His Master’s Voice”

**CARUSO.**  
12-inch Record (Pink Label), 12s. 6d.

**02397** *The Lost Chord* *Sullivan*  
(In English)

**T**HE singing of Sullivan’s “Lost Chord” by Signor Caruso is an event which makes it possible for the public to hear the greatest of living tenors in a song which appeals to everybody. The dramatic power infused into the song, notably in the lines—

“I have sought, but I seek it vainly,  
That one Lost Chord divine.”

is very characteristic of the singer; the last verse also being worked up to an intense pitch, the final phrase in which the high B flat occurs, being very finely sung. Signor Caruso copes manfully with the difficulties of the English language, and his words are always clear, even when their shading is unusual. A record of much interest, which admirers of Signor Caruso will not fail to secure. (*Speed 81.*)



Signor Enrico Caruso.



You know it by this  
The Master’s Voice

**T**HE following Records, sung in English by Caruso, have already been issued.

10-inch Records, 8s.  
4-3122 For you alone.  
4-2599 Love in mine.

*Published by His Master’s Voice & Co.*

His Master's Voice, New Catalogue September 1912, p. 16

Whatever the reason that pushed the record company to adopt, during the recording phase, a speed instead of another (relationship between physical space of the disc and sound content to be inserted, width of the grooves and sound quality, etc.. One thing is certain: the freedom of use of this speed, which was reflected in the flexibility mechanisms that the reproducing machines had in choosing which one to use, never compromised the reasons of sound fidelity, a prestigious factor for the record company as evidenced by the presence in the catalogs of the suggestion to the users on the correct use during the listening phase.

(Translated with DeepL.com free version)