

Gerard Souzay - A Recital of Old French Arias (1954)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Chanson Louis XIII* 2. *Cette Anne si belle (1615)* 3. *Tambourin (18th century)* 4. *Me veuxtú voir mourir (c.620)* 5. *Cachez, beaux yeux (1615)* 6. *Ma bergere non legere (1613)* 7. *Noel Auxois (17th century)* 8. *Brezairola (Berceuse)* 9. *Malurous qu'o uno fenno (Bourree)*
Gerard Souzay, Baritone Jacqueline Bonneau, Piano

G rard Souzay, whose real surname was Tisserand, studied philosophy in college although the family was musical (his sister was soprano Genevi ve Touraine). He was a student at the Paris Conservatoire from 1940 to 1945, where he studied voice with Vanni Marcoux and Claire Croiza, but principally took master classes with the foremost French song recitalist of that period, Pierre Bernac (Poulenc's longtime companion), as well as Lotte Lehmann before and after WWII. Souzay made his first recording the same year as his professional debut, 1944. After an official Paris debut in 1945, he participated in celebrations of Faur 's centenary in London. By then 27, he was the first of his generation after WWII to give song recitals internationally, preceding his younger colleague Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (b. 1925) by several years.

The French baritone made his U.S. debut in New York City's Town Hall in 1950, but did not sing opera until 1957, at Aix-en-Provence: Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto* and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. In 1960 Stokowski invited him to sing the title-role in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* with the New York City Center (later New York State) Opera. In 1962 he made his first appearance as Golaud in *Pell as et M lisande* at Rome under Ernest Ansermet, then repeated the role with the Paris Op ra in a performance celebrating the centenary of Debussy's birth. Eventually he sang at the Met in 1965, as Count Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro*, followed that same year by *Glyndebourne* (although illness limited him to a single performance), as well as debuts with the Vienna Staatsoper and Munich Opera. Other roles included Gluck's *Orfeo*, M phistoph l s in Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust*, Pollux in Rameau's *Castor et Pollux*, Massenet's Garrido in *La Navarraise* and Lescaut in *Manon*, even Wolfram in Wagner's *Tannh user*.

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However, recitals and orchestral concerts remained the principal focus of Souzay's long and distinguished career, which included annual recitals at the Salzburg Festival between 1959 and 1963. Proficient in 15 languages, he introduced Baroque music before the "original instrument" era -- especially music by Lully, Rameau, Handel, and Bach. He sang German as mellifluously and idiomatically as Fischer-Dieskau, his chief rival (whose intellectual word-stresses became increasingly intrusive), although Souzay's voice was lighter and smaller. His repertory embraced Russian, Spanish, Italian, even British songs. French chansons, withal, were his métier, beginning with Gounod, Fauré and their nineteenth century colleagues, but especially the Impressionist composers -- Duparc, Debussy, Ravel -- and the saucier Poulenc. Beginning in 1954, just as Poulenc partnered with Bernac until his death, Dalton Baldwin was Souzay's pianist, although not exclusively. They built an audience worldwide among audiences that had known only Italian or German opera. His presence onstage was elegantly handsome, and he sang with unforced, but nonetheless expressive, intense artistry that quietened even chronic coughers.

According to a comprehensive discography published in 1990 by Greenwood Press, he recorded over 750 titles on almost 50 labels -- 535 different catalog numbers -- ranging from 78-rpm discs to CD reissues, and was awarded France's Grand Prix du Disque three times. Apart from operas, however, he infrequently recorded with others, only recording duets with Germaine Lubin, Elly Ameling, and his sister Geneviève. In 1985, Souzay joined the music faculty at Indiana University in Bloomington, but also taught at the University of Texas in Austin starting in 1986, where Stephen Mims made a documentary film about him, *Souzay: A Life in Art*. In addition, indefatigably, he gave master classes at the Juilliard School in New York, and in Paris, Holland, England, and Japan, where he was a special favorite of audiences in German as well as French music. --- Roger Dettmer, Rovi

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