
Maria Callas alias Nina Foresti alias Anita Duval

The case of the 1935 Major Bowes Amateur Hour solved at last

Introduction

It is a continuing absolute pleasure to be a member of *The Maria Callas International Club* and to have been invited (for the third time) to write another essay, now for this November Magazine.

Since becoming a member, in March 2017, I have found endless excitement in being able to scour all our back issues that are now on my computer (with the original USB port, locked away in my safe [along with Maria Callas' mother of pearl rosary that was seen hanging beside her bed in a very late colour photograph of her]) for there is a mountain of scholarly information to be absorbed on what I can honestly say is one of the very great passions in my life.

Issues 27, 28 and 33 have been of particular personal interest, because each essay addresses, in one way or another, the Nina Foresti mystery. Having been an international executive search consultant (head-hunter is the 'slang' terminology) combined with a strong background in psychology since my university studies, this particular aspect of the Callas story has always held a very strong interest for me.

Those three Magazines have been read countless times by me. Having said that, when it became apparent that it looked like I had unearthed a point of view that was not only new and interesting, but something I believed shed a new and different light on the issue, I made a tentative approach to our editor Karl. My objective was to see if he would be interested in some 'more' from me on this specific subject: 'Maria Callas vs. Nina Foresti'.

I definitely did not want to disappoint members with just a re-hash of what had been very carefully written and argued in the past, though I did of course have in my kit-bag my two previous essays on Callas' handwriting and Callas' correspondence with Rudolf Bing. It was, in fact, the handwriting side of the Nina Foresti story that particularly interested me and since this aspect had not, in truth, been thoroughly addressed in the past it

David Crothers

seemed to me an appropriate basis for my case to reopen the Nina Foresti story.

With that in mind, I was able to secure Karl's very valuable approval to go ahead. He after all, is our erstwhile leader!

What follows:

- ...reads something like a detective story... (I am comfortable with this style)
- ...and it is very long.
- On the other hand, this essay needs, in my opinion, to be as comprehensive as possible...
- ...and my position is that it does add something fresh and new to the Maria Callas literature.

As you can imagine, a very great amount of investigative work has gone into this enterprise and I make no apology for that, because it has to be as thorough as possible, in order that it stands the test of time. It is a piece that I hope readers can take on board and bring into their hearts... and not find any holes herein... logical or in any other form.

The Essay

My undergraduate degrees were taken under the auspices of The University of Sydney. That meant exams in late November, a reconvening in mid-February and an in-between summer that always started off in the depths of the annual New York winter.

Maria Callas had 'come to me' early on, in 1956/7 when my step-father and mother lived in Milan – he as an honorary government trade advisor. Mother happened to be an Italian opera lover and given her 'status', as the spouse of an Australian government official, she had the opportunity to see Callas at La Scala whenever she wanted. That meant 'being there' for the opening night of *Anna Bolena*, in April 1957, for example.

I knew little if anything about opera way back then (I was just ten), but when my mother presented me with 'this':



It seems only fair that fellow-members appreciate at least a little about me... so that you'll know where my love-affair with Maria Callas actually started.

Those Australian summer periods afforded me the opportunity to travel overseas every year for four consecutive annual university holidays. And I went to New York on each occasion. Whilst there, I visited all the NYC specialist record shops; hence the opportunity to drag back to Sydney (or Manchester in the UK where I was subsequently working) the very latest in rare Callas (live) recordings. Suitcase loads in fact, all of which have now been given away and replaced with mountains of CDs (imagine the amount of space saved!).

One of my very greatest sources was: Darton Records at 160 W 56 St. which was right next to Carnegie Hall and it was there, probably in December 1968 that Joe Darton said: "David, you just have to have this!": HRE-7.

This Historic Record Enterprise disk contained *Madama Butterfly*, 'Un bel di' sung by Nina Foresti on the Major Bowes Amateur Hour broadcast of 7 April 1935. The non-descript disk (in a plain white sleeve) was no bigger than a '45' and also contained two other totally (then) 'unknown live rarities'; these being *The Proch Variations*: II March 1951 and 'Musetta's Waltz': 17 May, 1963.

MARIA CALLAS
Rarest Recordings
Never Before Available

1. PROCH: VARIATIONS 3/11/51
incredible performance including TWO full-voice sustained HIGH F's!!
2. PUCCINI: UN BEL DI 4/7/35
allegedly Maria Callas at the age of 12 singing on the Amateur Hour under the name of Nina Foresti.
3. PUCCINI: MUSETTA'S WALTZ 5/17/63
All Live Performances
MUST BE HEARD TO BE BELIEVED
HRE-7

But Joe impressed upon me: "David, you just have to have this!" It probably cost me no more than \$20.

Back in Australia and ready for the next university year, I was not overwhelmed by 'that' particular selection, but, of course, being a true Callas collector by then... of course I had to have it.

The vast majority of my working life, after two years in the UK, was spent in Hong Kong (1970's through late 1990's) and the opportunities I had for international travel, afforded me every possible chance to enlarge my Callas record collection via such famous New York shops as Barnes and Noble and Tower Records, and, of course, Darton Records. By 1994, five years before I returned to Sydney, I decided to buy my very first Callas signed photo – of course, I already had 'that picture above', tucked away in some folder – and since someone had tipped me off to Bob Tollett, the de rigueur 'go-to' New York autograph dealer of the time:



I bought 'this', my first purchase, from him and paid more than US 1000 for the privilege! (See picture above.)

He, first and foremost, was a businessman; one who also exhibited the greatest of good taste in autograph dealing. I soon discovered, in addition, that he had a preeminent interest in all things Callas, particularly as he peppered me with questions about my opinions on 'The Nina Foresti Case', along with multiple other Maria Callas curiosities.

There is absolutely no doubt that it was Bob Tollett, who turned me from being just a buyer of her signed photographs, programmes and letters, into a person who felt it was important to get to know and understand the artist as well.

Everyone who has read my essays on Maria Callas' autographs and Callas' interaction with Rudolf Bing, knows that I have taken up the cudgel, in terms of investigating the remaining 'unknowns' about her and in all probability, it was Bob Tollett (RIP) who put the Nina Foresti situation onto one of my Maria Callas bucket lists. He certainly planted the 'is it or is it not' question firmly into my head!

In May 2007, a gentleman – an American musicologist is my way of best describing him – wrote to me (based on a referral from Roger Gross – the greatest then US autograph dealer and a very good friend), following the demise of Bob Tollett, seeking my opinion on 'that' controversy as to whether I thought Maria Callas and Nina Foresti were one and

the same person.

As he does not want his name mentioned, nor will he permit publication of his (two) emails to me, I am happy to accede to his wishes. On the other hand, he agrees that my thoughts and theories about the questions he originally brought to my attention can be the subject of various sections of my essay today, without using his exact words or disclosing his name. I am very happy to accede to this procedural straight-jacket.

Anyway, what he originally wrote to me must have been based on the very substantial relationship I had with Roger Gross, in that my Callas collection at that time contained many important signed materials from the artist, together with the fact that Roger had undoubtedly told him that we talked very regularly on the telephone. In other words, my immediate impression was that he was told that my opinions must be worth seeking.

Anyway, the basis of this first email from 'him' (dated 11 May 2008. Followed by an even more extensive one the day after, on 12 May) was really very shocking to me and in a nut-shell, the essence was that he knew John Ardoin very well. Beyond that, that he (Ardoin) had been happily shooting his mouth off about the fact that he had purposely pulled off a malicious deception/invention that Maria Callas and Nina Foresti were one and the same person. He (inter alia) knew he was one of the most trusted (read: well thought of) Callas scholars in the entire world and so... everyone would believe him. This thesis went as near as possible to 'smelling' because it must be stated that what this American was writing to me about the deceased Ardoin, was perpetrated whilst Callas was alive.

By way of background, there are two separate incidents/issues at play here.

The first is that here are serious negative opinions about Ardoin's *Dallas Morning Herald* 'honest' review of Callas' 12 March 1974 Dallas State Fair Music Hall concert, where she appeared alone, due to the indisposition of Giuseppe Di Stefano on that particular evening. It is clear that Callas and Ardoin were 'close' and that she expected a truthful opinion of her performance. What is less clear was exactly how deeply this was discussed, for on the one hand, Callas is



said to have stated that “yes, she wanted honesty” (or rather... “private honesty”) but not honesty that was printed in the *Dallas Morning Herald*.

This is, on the face of it, a ridiculous situation, because Ardoin was a respected journalist and his Dallas readers would have expected a truthful review of the concert.

My American musicologist email contact was most probably right when he wrote to me that Ardoin was the shallowest of persons and in a superior (read: safer) position to what he ‘knew’ was a very vulnerable Callas. From this distance, it was clearly impossible of Ardoin to hold the two conflicting positions:

- Of promising Callas something he knew he couldn’t deliver because...
- ...he was at the same time a respected journalist with a duty of care to write and honest review to his readers.

My personal beliefs say that Ardoin should have never promised what he apparently did to Callas (and if he did, this is prima facie evidence of his failure as a ‘man’ to be honest with everyone, because he was also a well-known journalist. But that is all I wish to say on the matter, save that it probably has some bearing on what comes next. (Readers of course are encouraged to have their own views on the matter. More detailed information about Ardoin [1935-2001] can be found in his obituary as published in Magazine No. 33 – July 2001.)

In any case, I got the additional sense that my email correspondent thought that this was a callous and nasty thing to have done and that, even though Ardoin and the correspondent knew each other very well, he basically had little or no time for this sort of behaviour and what did I think about it all?

To me, Callas and Foresti were one and the same person, despite his highly negative opinion of Ardoin himself. And that, naturally, was the second and far more important matter. What was being sought was fairly and squarely an email containing my professional opinion that quite possibly might have been designed to trap me into saying something stupid.

I must point out here and now, that my American musicologist contact did not believe that Callas and Foresti were one and the same person, because in his first email to me he writes of Joel

Hoenig (13 October 1936 - 25 September 2003) an American music critic, copy editor, writer, and pianist who is best remembered for his extensive contributions to *Opera News* magazine. Hoenig had apparently written to him stating that “he had just discovered actual proof that Nina Foresti was not Callas and was preparing to write an article about it.” Hoenig however had inconveniently died, however it must be said... and readers should give due weight to the following fact... that this ‘inconvenience’ lasted for over six and a half years. My first email, you see, was dated 8 May 2008. This is suspicious in and of itself!

In any case, this email came totally out of the blue and was even addressed to me by my formal name – something many Australians find somewhat strange, given the generally informal nation that we are. Anyhow, as I had recently appeared on a world-wide television programme, talking about my Maria Callas collection, I thought: “Well, why not give this a solid go, because I had been a researcher all my working life and I thought I could do a pretty good job.”

I was not then the expert that I stake myself out to be today, but still, there was no reason for me not to tackle this task, because

- it was right up one of my principal fields of life interest and
- it afforded me the opportunity to use my psychological field of university obtained knowledge in a very important practical sense.

I had never heard of this gentleman ever before. Additionally, I had the distinct advantage of never having met Ardoin. One can imagine how such a volatile email would have presented something of a challenge for me, since this Nina Foresti ‘thing’ was always lurking there in the back of my head. Indeed, the conundrum had grown ‘bigger’ and had assumed greater importance over the years, as my collection, inquisitiveness and knowledge about Callas had expanded. So, I thought: “Why not give this person a decent, well thought out, academically researched reply? You’ve worked as a researcher in one way or another for most of your professional life; why not unleash that ‘expertise’ on something you truly love: Maria Callas?”

By this stage of my (Callas) life, I had

all the books and CDs/DVDs and so I set about creating a very extensive email in reply:

And here it is, in full (albeit very slightly edited, based on copyright considerations) and dated 11 May, 2008:

*I’m a little late with my reply – the reason being that I did not get back from that splendid Fille du Regiment of yours from the Met, until well after 3pm on Saturday. I’ll write about that, in a separate email. The appalling thing, was that sentence ‘above’ was written yesterday – it now being well after noon, Sunday. Now, I thought I had all my relevant documentation together and with minor exceptions, that was true. It was all scanned – to put into this email – but I wanted to use ‘Windows Paint’ to highlight important parts in **bold**.*

So, after Mass today, I’m back at it again – and whilst I’ve known the ‘outcome’ since ten minutes after I picked up the first book, I’ve not been happy with the information trail that supports my opinion. In a court of criminal law, hearsay (...I was told personally, that Callas said to a friend whom I know...) is not acceptable, in terms of being admissible evidence for the determination of an outcome.

- I intend including the hearsay here, in this essay and will state clearly when this happens.
- There is though, ample direct evidence to get to my ‘result’ even were you to rule out the indirect evidence (‘claims’).
- In other words, I believe you can be safe with the fact that what comes below, falls within the ‘Beyond Reasonable Doubt’ category...
- ...and does not go even near the lowest standard of acceptability ‘the balance of probabilities’.
- Indeed, even in the face of some of the most shockingly sloppy journalism I’ve EVER read (about a major personality)...
- ...I’ll stick out my proverbial neck and say I am 100% sure of what I write below...
- ...even though there is certainly one element – an address – I’ve not been able to verify without question.

At the outset, I must state that most of those authors who have profited over Maria Callas books over the years ought to be ‘shot’ for plagiarism/unsubstantiated opinions being elevated to fact/pyramid selling of other writer’s work as being included as their own AND to be brutally frank, some of the

worst authorship I've ever encountered. The un-attributed 'copying' that has gone on in describing Callas' early life – without any attempt to check facts, is outright scandalous. Of the Nina Foresti issue, this is my DEFINITIVE interpretation and I have no doubt no one alive could produce this effort... so here it goes.

We must though, start with one fundamental truth about Maria Callas, that being that there were two beings in this body:

- Callas, the artist (who always kept up the Maria Callas illusion) and the woman (who was, to a greater degree, more truthful...)
- ...but not completely)... and that led biographers NOT to ask her the difficult questions.
- The question 'in the frame here' is: "Did you, Maria, sing under the name of Nina Foresti, on The Major Bowes Talent Show, on 7 April, 1935?"
- I can find NO EVIDENCE anyone ever asked Maria this, because I believe everyone was both in love with and in awe of Callas at the same time.
- Stancioff (1988) claims she did, but I'm NOT satisfied with how she wrote the answer – close friend or no...
- ...notwithstanding she is apparently still alive.
- Anything and everything can and has been written about Maria Callas AFTER she died...
- ...but it is equally clear to me that 'circumspection' was the order of the day when going into 'print' pre-September 17, 1977.

No one, to my knowledge, has gotten these 'Radio Shows' right, though I accept that the mother WANTED Maria to perform AND that Maria wanted to appear.

- Whether or not Callas had a happy childhood is hardly the point.

What is obvious is that there came a time when she had some confidence in front of an audience/microphone...

- ...because of her unusual vocal instrument.
- Let's be clear here: Callas in my opinion had just as much 'drive' at 11-12 prior to leaving for Greece in early 1937 as her mother had 'push'.

In presenting my assessment of the material for and against Callas and Foresti being one and the same person, the obvious (indeed the only) way to go, is with the 'oldest' evidence first. There is a Norman Ross interview from Chicago in 1957, but I'll come to that a little later, since the content is much the same content as her televised David Frost interview of 1970. So... we'll start

with the Mother's book in 1960:

This year, when Maria was eleven, she made what could be called her first public appearance, not in person but on a nationwide amateur hour over WOR and the Mutual Network. Maria sang "La Paloma" and "The Heart Is Free" and won the sponsor's first prize, a beautiful Bulova watch. I was as proud as any mother would be, but although Maria was pleased with the watch, she was not as much impressed by her success as I was. In those days she wanted to be a dentist, not a singer! More-

- The reference to WOR is true (it did subsequently become The Mutual Network) and I am also sure this account that an eleven-year-old Callas appeared at the Bowes audition (this was NOT broadcast) – almost certainly accompanied by her elder sister on the piano – is equally accurate.
- Callas DID NOT win a Bulova Watch at the Major Bowes program, for this was NOT the formula, for successful applicants.
- Callas' mother's book is notoriously inaccurate in many respects, but so are ALL the others.
- Proof, is NOT required here (well at this point), though you will find that I use both induction and deduction here (together with, as I said, some hearsay, that overlays all) and that my sequential analysis will resolve ALL but one issue.
- (Jackie, by the way, wanted to be the dentist; Maria would have chosen acting or piano playing and though these are her own recorded words... Well, I've already stated she was inclined to say what she wanted broadcast... you never know what was actually in her mind.
- (Always Callas the artist, don't you know.)

At the age of eleven, urged on by Mama, Maria began to appear at children's contests and on radio programs. At first she found the atmosphere of these shows oppressive. She was frightened by crowds, lacked confidence, and, when the moment came to perform, often had the panicky sensation that no sound would leave her throat. However, her mother insisted that these appearances were important in building a career.

With experience and the as-yet-unrealized desire to succeed, Maria overcame her feelings of fright and insecurity well enough to eventually win a prize on Major Bowes's amateur hour. On one occasion, she even traveled to Chicago to take part in a children's show, where the second prize was awarded to her by comedian Jack Benny.

- This (above) is the first Jellinek book – also from 1960.
- Whether Maria won a prize on The Major Bowes Talent Hour is less important than these facts:
- The Bowes Show took place in New York. (Despite what Maria says later, Benny never had any role as a judge in the Bowes show... particularly as a Master of Ceremonies.)
- The performance where Jack Benny Show WAS present – apparently took place

in Chicago – a point I do accept. I also suspect it was POST the Bowes performance – not BEFORE it.

- There, Maria DID win a Bulova watch, but this watch was the second prize; NOT the first prize.

At school concerts too she was always popular with her soprano voice. But to her mother she was more than all this, she was an *enfant prodige*. Evangelia would lose no opportunity to show off her daughter's singing. The rather shy Maria must have been harassed on many occasions when her mother pushed her into several radio contests. Not a very happy experience, even though on one occasion she won first prize—a watch—on a recorded amateur radio programme.

- This comes out of Galatopoulos' 1963 opus.
- The program where Maria was an 'enfant prodige' and had a jury of similarly talented children, was the Chicago Benny program...
- ...where she won the Bulova Watch second prize.

FROST INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT (1970)

(D = David Frost; M = Maria Callas)

D: How old were you when you started?

M: When I started I was very young; I was only 13. I had already studied (al)though, already here. I was sent to contests by my mother – WOR. I think there was a Major Bowes program for children. Jack Benny was the Master of Ceremonies.

D: A sort of talent show, wasn't it?

M: Yes, I think it was every week; I didn't get the prize.

D: You didn't win the talent show?

M: No and Jack Benny was furious, but anyway, I didn't win it.

D: Who beat you?

M: An accordion player and I've always wondered where he is and if he's still alive and what happened to him!

D: That's amazing!

M: Excuse me for interrupting. We did have a jury of 'enfants prodiges' – youngsters who had made good.

D: That is fascinating. And that was here in New York?

M: Yes, that was here in New York. And I also sang at WQXR; I think that's where I met for the first time, Gladys Swarthout. Charming

- From this televised Frost interview, comes the above transcript.
- Started as thirteen – "NO, Callas was eleven?"
- WOR – Major Bowes – a correct admission, but Jack Benny was NOT Master of Ceremonies.
- On Callas' part, I believe this was wilful obfuscation. (Frost is a great researcher, but he can NOT have known about Nina Foresti at this point).
- The show where the accordion player beat her, was in Chicago, where she won the Bulova watch as a SECOND Prize and where the 'enfants prodiges' were... perhaps with the addition of Jack Benny himself... the

judging panel.

• No doubt, Callas met Swarthout (an important opera singer at the time) at WQXR (this station opened in 1936 in New York) but that meeting had NOTHING to do with Major Bowes (New York) OR Jack Benny (Chicago).

In 1957 IN CHICAGO, Callas did a radio interview with Norman Ross – one that is not greatly different (in terms of content) to what she said to Frost 13 years later, in 1970, save that this ‘below’ accurately describes the Chicago experience:

- “You sang on the radio here (in Chicago) before you went to Athens? Who was the MC on that program?”
- “The MC was Jack Benny – imagine?! I didn’t win the first prize. Oddly enough oh... Jack Benny was so disappointed he just couldn’t, couldn’t believe it. There was a jury of, you know, very famous children at that time; I don’t remember who they were.”
- “Remember what you won?”
- “I won a Bulova wrist-watch and the winner of the first prize, I would be most curious to know what happened to this boy; he was an accordion player. Imagine!!”

Main operatic career

After returning to the United States and reuniting with her father in September 1945, Callas made the round of auditions. In December of that year, she auditioned for Edward Johnson the general manager of the Metropolitan Opera and was favourably received: “Exceptional voice, ought to be heard very soon on stage”. Callas maintained that the Met offered her *Madama Butterfly* and *Fidelio*, to be performed in Philadelphia and sung in English, both of which she declined, feeling she was too fat for *Butterfly* and did not like the idea of opera in English. Although no written evidence of this offer exists in the Met’s records, in a 1958 interview with *The New York Post*, Johnson corroborated Callas’s story: “We offered her a contract, but she didn’t like it, because of the contract, not because of the roles. She was right in turning it down; it was frankly a beginner’s contract.”

When she attended President Kennedy’s birthday party at Madison Square Garden in May 1962, she spoke with Jack Benny. “We’ve met before, Mr. Benny. Don’t you remember?” When Benny couldn’t recall, she explained, “I made my first radio appearance as a contestant on a *Major Bowes Amateur Hour* and you were one of the judges. I came in second because you were the only judge who voted for me.” I. Fein, “Jack Benny, An Intimate Biography”, (New York, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1976), 138-139.

- This is a section of a review of Callas’ operatic career, containing an excerpt from Fein’s Jack Benny biography, where Callas meets Benny, in 1962 at the Kennedy gala (at which Marilyn Monroe famously sang ‘Happy Birthday, Mr. President’.)
- Whether or not Callas mixed up the Bowes reference with Jack Benny on purpose, is unimportant. It confirms the Major Bowes appearance AND her Chicago second prize.

There is little question Callas was not prepared to reveal the truth of the Nina Foresti

appearance at this point, nor did she have any reason to expose this cover-up of hers.

• Ardoin’s first ‘written’ entry to the Nina Foresti fray was in 1976 and this First Edition extract (published in 1977 BEFORE CALLAS DIED), is the result.

Then there is the question of the ‘Nina Foresti’ recording of ‘Un bel di’ from *Madama Butterfly* on the Major Bowes Amateur Hour broadcast on April 7, 1935. It is known that Callas appeared on one of the earliest Bowes programmes before she left to study in Greece in 1937. The transcription discs of the Amateur Hour programme have been preserved, and tape transfers were placed at my disposal. However, in the period when it might have been possible for Callas to have been a contestant, there was not a singer named Mary Ann Callas (as she was called at school) or even Anna Maria Kalogeropoulos (as she was, in part, christened). I presumed she had appeared under a false name, one invented perhaps to prevent her father’s knowing, for he disapproved of his wife’s domineering ambitions for their younger daughter.

I listened to all female contestants between the years 1935 (when the programme began) and 1937, performing anything which could be considered remotely serious. The one possibility was a soprano named ‘Nina Foresti’, who sang ‘Un bel di’ as her audition piece. There was good reason to suspect the name, for Miss Foresti’s letter to the Bowes staff and her subsequent formal application were submitted under the name of ‘Anita Duval’. It was only at the time of the audition that Miss Duval became Miss Foresti.

The tape of the Foresti audition (given a ‘D’ rating by the Bowes staff with the note, ‘Faint possibility for future’) revealed a singing voice weak and quite unlike anything known to be by Callas. The speaking voice, however, in quick banter with Bowes before singing, bears an astonishing resemblance. Also, during their chat, the girl states that her father is a ‘chemist’ (as was George Callas), who had lost his business (as had Callas’ father five years before). This, together with statements in the letter and application which fit details in Callas’ life at this time – she would have been eleven, but her mother has written she passed for sixteen – made me believe that if a recording existed of Callas on the Bowes show, this was it. A copy of the ‘Nina Foresti’ tape was later included as part of a private disc (FWR 656) and what had been supposition began to be taken as fact. To complicate matters further, Callas steadfastly denies ever singing under any name but her own.

- (I doubt though, he knew of the Benny bio. at that time.)
- It was in fact the first scholarly article on Bowes and Nina Foresti and had – at the time – to be taken at face value.
- A seven-inch EP was already circulating in NYC and I picked up mine, from Joe Darton (160 W 56 Street) at least five years prior.
- Scholarly or not, I am sure Ardoin LEFT OUT information he had already obtained (and copied) from the highly well documented Bowes files... BECAUSE as I said, Callas was still alive, when this First Edition was published.
- On the ‘above’ and despite the comment that this sounded unlike anything known to by Callas, at this point, Ardoin knew what he knew...
- ...because he ALREADY had more than one copied document from the Bowes archive...
- ...but for the reasons I’ve mentioned above, was NOT prepared to release these ‘then’!!! After Callas died though, the gloves were off and every rat that had ever lived in a sewer, launched into print:
- Including Steven Linakis, who wrote the trash book ‘Diva’ about the cousin he never

even knew:

I have heard stories of how Litz pushed Maria and how Maria was the by-product, particularly in her shortcomings, of a stage mother. Maria may have gone to her grave believing it, but Litz’s only crime, if it was then a crime, was to do everything she could for her daughters and start them each off with the same opportunities and the same repertory. My own view is that Litz simply had enormous pride and belief in her daughters and that Maria would never have done anything she didn’t want to do.

Maria would sing at the drop of a hat. She sang for public-school events at every opportunity and even once sang down to the street, where a crowd gathered. No one beat her or put her in bondage to sing on the “Major Bowes’ Amateur Hour.” You couldn’t have kept her away. I am almost sure it was her own idea to use the ludicrous stage name of “Anita Duval,” which to me sounded more appropriate for burlesque. I believe she did appear under the name of “Nina Foresti” although I know she won the show’s first prize, a Bulova watch.

- Apart from the agenda of ripping off his cousin’s memory, there was doubtless no agenda about his reference to Callas singing on Major Bowes and that she used the Stage Name of Anita Duval/Nina Foresti.

I do not know exactly when the Ardoin deception (what and who was he trying to deceive?) started, but he clearly felt no reason for restraint, when he published this ‘update’ in his second (1982) edition of ‘The Callas Legacy’ in 1982:

Greece in 1937. The transcription discs of the Amateur Hour program have been preserved, and tape transfers were placed at my disposal. However, in the period when it might have been possible for Callas to have been a contestant, there was not a singer named Mary Ann Callas (as she was called at school) or even Anna Maria Kalogeropoulos (as she was, in part, christened). I presumed she had appeared under a false name, one invented perhaps to prevent her father’s knowing, for he disapproved of his wife’s domineering ambitions for their younger daughter.

I listened to all female contestants between the years 1935 (when the program began) and 1937, performing anything that could be considered remotely serious. The one possibility was a soprano named “Nina Foresti,” who sang “Un bel di” as her audition piece. There was good reason to suspect the name, for Miss Foresti’s letter to the Bowes staff and her subsequent formal application were submitted under the name of “Anita Duval.” It was only at the time of the audition that Miss Duval became Miss Foresti.

The tape of the Foresti audition (given a “D” rating by the Bowes staff with the note, “Faint possibility for future”) revealed a singing voice weak and quite unlike anything known to be by Callas. The speaking voice, however, in quick banter with Bowes before singing, bears an astonishing resemblance. Also, during their chat, the girl states that her father is a “druggist” (as was George Callas), who had lost his business (as had Callas’ father five years before). This, together with statements in the letter and application which fit details in Callas’ life at this time—she would have been eleven, but her mother has written she passed for sixteen—made me believe that if a recording existed of Callas on the Bowes show, this was it. A copy of the “Nina Foresti” tape was later included as part of three private discs (FWR 656, HRE-7, MDP 016) and what had been supposition began to be taken as fact. To complicate matters further, Callas steadfastly denied ever singing under any name but her own. However, in his book *Diva: Life and Death of Maria Callas*, her cousin Stephen Linakis confirms that Foresti, Duval, and Callas were one and the same person.

The earliest example of her voice, apart from the Amateur Hour appearance, is to be found in two excerpts from the 1949 season in Buenos Aires. In this period, it was a voice obviously of a good size; Callas still considered herself a dramatic soprano at this

- Now Ardoin can write what text he likes on the page (2) above, but NOTHING on this earth can take away (read: remove) the scan, he reproduced on page (3). (See illustration on next page above.)
- Particularly as he writes what he does, underneath this letter extract.
- Remember now, I bought this book, when it first appeared and thus twenty-six years ago... and have NOT revisited the question, ever since then.

The writer is a young soprano who has studied music and singing several years. Competent judges have pronounced my voice beautiful but with all that, it is so very difficult to find an opening, an opportunity for a real test to prove exactly what I can do. Your amateur should hope, may answer this need.

Cordially awaiting your reply, I remain,

Very sincerely,
 5 Forest
 549 West 144 St.
 N.Y.C. *Quite Duval*

Eleven-year-old Maria Callas' letter of application to the Major Bowes Amateur Hour.

- Any reasonable person will accept that David Crothers knew NOTHING about Maria Callas in 1982, by comparison with what he KNOWS in 2008.
- In fact, I doubt anyone else would be prepared to go down the following track (above and below)... because they simply DO NOT HAVE THE EVIDENCE IN 'HOUSE' to do so.
- Additionally, since Ardoin NEVER republished this scan in either his 1991 Second Reprint or his 1995 Third Reprint...
- ...I very much doubt too many Callas 'experts' have seen this... in fact, I think he was hiding it on purpose – maybe for the very reasons you yourself suggest.

The problem for any Ardoin deception though – during or after his life – is that I HAVE (seen the above handwriting). From this point alone, Ardoin's deception that Callas was NOT Nina Foresti (indeed your friend's so-called proof) now goes right down the drain, for I doubt he ever expected

The writer is a young soprano who has studied music and singing several years. Competent judges have pronounced my voice beautiful but with all that, it is so very difficult to find an opening, an opportunity for a real test to prove exactly what I can do. Your amateur should hope, may answer this need.

Cordially awaiting your reply, I remain,

Very sincerely,
 5 Forest
 549 West 144 St.
 N.Y.C. *Quite Duval*

Eleven-year-old Maria Callas' letter of application to the Major Bowes Amateur Hour.

the scan – now isolated below – would fall into the hands of a Callas handwriting expert!! (See illustration on previous column below.)

- In the above hand-written extract, the Foresti and Duval names appear on one page...
- ...and there is absolutely NO QUESTION AT ALL THAT THAT PAGE WAS WRITTEN IN ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD MARIA CALLAS' OWN HAND!!!!
- Shocking? No, it shouldn't be and here's the rock-solid evidence:

Probably they will find the certificate at the Bureau of Vital Statistics.

Henry - please & a thousand times please work on it as though it were your marriage. It all depends on this paper & it doesn't come in time till Sep. & I know it will & can if someone does it there personally -

Depending on your kindness, as usual, I beg you to answer me right away - & to tele-graph each soon at New York -

So long, sweet - make me happy & don't forget to write your dream. I'd rather you not spread the news yet please? Love to Brooks!!! Maria

Roma 23 aprile 1949

Spiegati bene, la migrazione Bristol & Albergo Palazzo per le fondazioni da cui ha usata. FIORINI

Il 21 v. c. siamo spacciati e ogni giorno i nostri per Buenos Aires. Si possono i ricambi per Buenos Aires. Si possono i ricambi per Buenos Aires. Si possono i ricambi per Buenos Aires.

Dear Henry -

I write, as you asked, from Genova where right after my marriage yesterday at 4:00 pm. I've fled to you are right, dear, to be angry over my silence but what paper, by passport & marriage - I thought I'd go crazy - as far as my expense - I spent terribly & spread all over my neck & nose & ears. But, thank the Lord it finally decide

(See also illustrations on the next column.)

- Now even if Ardoin was a master forger, he could NOT produce an eleven-year old's rudimentary running-writing...
- ...where there is example after example after example of similarity with how Maria Callas wrote as an adult.

Maria Zoragoras -

Tell my mother that I don't want her to make this trip - I don't want anymore travelling and throwing away money - I am definite about it, yes. and will be to stop annoying my sister with her stupid letters -

I'm in a hurry for a recording session, that's the last one - so let's love to you and Sally and remember until the end of August at that address in Athens

your Maria

36 Avenue Georges Mandel Paris 12

Dearest Leo -

I received your very dear letter and smiled about - I too would love to find a wonderful companion - like you were for Sally - but my dear beautiful men are impossible to find - if you have such friends I would love to meet them -

In my condition he has to be intelligent, well off - consider me I can live on with devotion and faith - He has to be honest - generous and not try to change me, like our dead friend.

When are you men?

36 Avenue Georges Mandel Paris 12

Dear friend -

I had written to thank you but I had lost your address - Now that I have it I wish to thank you sincerely for all the best wishes and many thanks to your mother -

Sincerely,
 Maria Callas

26/10/68

- Her p's and n's were ALWAYS unusual – these MATCH.
- She was apt to underline, in letters – just as with the 1935 letter.
- The bottoms of the y's and g's are very idiosyncratic in the 1935 extract and these ARE

visible (albeit not all the time) in her sophisticated adult writing.

• I would NOT give 0.0000000000001% chance that the Foresti/Duval extract is NOT a match for Maria Callas' adult writing...

• ...and this is something that has only pounced on me in the last couple of days.

• So... Callas adult handwriting being an indisputable match for the Duval/Foresti naive handwriting from 1935...

• ...by deduction, Duval = Foresti = Maria Callas and therefore the April 07 Nina Foresti Major Bowes sound-bite MUST be an eleven-year-old Maria Callas in performance.

Penultimately, this book came out in 1988:

Jackie's comments, Maria's version of her childhood and my own thoughts slowly converged in confusion. If Maria had not been pushed, then what about the tape author and music critic John Ardoin had found? He reports that Maria told him she sang on the "Major Bowes Amateur Hour" when she was thirteen. Yet when I listened to the deep, resonant voice it seemed mature for an eighth-grader. In addition to complaining that her mother pushed her relentlessly, Maria had, in fact, told me about a singing contest. We were swapping tales of times we'd made up names for ourselves. I mentioned that whenever strangers bothered me at parties or on trips, I kept my anonymity by calling myself Mimosa Dubois. Maria was amused. "When I was a kid," she told me, "I took part in a singing competition. My father didn't like the idea because I was too young. In fact, my mother raised my age to sixteen so that I could qualify. I called myself Anita Duval. That way my father wouldn't find out. Afterwards I switched to Nina Foresti. I thought that sounded more like an opera singer!"

When I told John this, he remarked, "Maria always denied that she had ever sung under any name than her own, but still, I firmly believe that the voice on the tape was hers."

Ardoin also discovered a letter dated March 13, 1935 addressed in care of Foresti, 549 West 144 Street, which corresponds to the address where the Kalogeropoulos family lived at the time. The letter, probably written by the thirteen-year-old Miss Foresti's mother, requests an audition for the radio program:

My musical studies were begun when I was four years old. I studied piano many years but as my family was in very comfortable circumstances, my

music was not considered seriously. I was sent to finishing school, studied languages and singing all as social accomplishments only. One day in 1930, upon our return from a cruise, we found our "comfortable circumstances" had vanished so I have been giving piano instruction. However, I always loved to sing so I continued my vocal studies and have sung in concerts and made my debut as Nedda, in *Pagliacci*, but as an amateur. My voice is admired but opportunities are so few and I find that corner—from amateur to professional—a very difficult one to turn.

(Marginal notes, scribbled by a judge at the auditions, indicate that the "red-haired" Nina Foresti, had sung "Un bel di" and that she had "faint possibility for future.")

"But Jackie," I persisted, "what about the 'Major Bowes Amateur Hour' contest? Didn't your mother push Maria into that?"

Jackie perused the menu. She raised her eyes and gave her order to the waiter in Greek. "No, Nadia. From a small girl Mary loved music and wanted to be an opera singer."

"Maria told me she wanted to be a dentist."

"No. I'm the one who wanted to be the dentist." Jackie returned the menu.

"... You see, we read in the paper that there was going to be this contest for children. So my mother said to Mary, 'Why don't you sing that nice little song you know?' And my mother wrote and they said, 'Come and sing.'"

"So, your mother wrote the letter and signed it Anita Duval. And then Maria called herself Nina Foresti when she tried out at the competition?"

"Nina Foresti? Who is Nina Foresti? Oh, that's Mary's fantasy again. I taught her the song and I accompanied her. It was "A Heart That's Free," a Jeannette MacDonald song. She was ten years old, she was a small girl."

Perhaps the singing competition Jackie referred to was not the "Major Bowes Amateur Hour" but a children's show in Chicago hosted by Jack Benny where Ardoin assures us Maria did indeed sing "A Heart That's Free." It's also possible that Jackie accompanied Maria singing that song for the Major Bowes audition on March 28, 1935, then, on the day of the broadcast 'Nina Foresti' sang "Un bel Di." The contradictions do not stop here.

"And what did your father think of the audition?" I asked.

"He didn't mind. He was pleased. It was just a children's contest!" Jackie exclaimed.

• Forget the: "When I was a kid... I called myself Anita Duval... and later Nina Foresti" ... or make of it what you will.

• At this point, Maria was well and truly dead and Stancioff could pretty much write what she liked... with very little fear of contradiction.

• On the bottom of page 41, continuing to 42, she quotes directly from the 'audition letter' Ardoin copied from the Bowes files.

• In all probability, it IS written by Callas' mother; but we will never know, because the 'original' remains in the Bowes files.

• What Ardoin did not bargain for, was someone like me, drawing all the links to this deception of his together and disproving his double gambit.

• Ardoin KNEW it was Callas singing 'Un bel di', because he had copied a hand-written letter of enquiry that he now had to realise was in Callas own hand... and that it must have been written prior to March 13, 1935, when the formal application (written by the mother – according to Stancioff) was sent to The Bowes Organization.

• So... Callas appeared in audition (almost certainly with her sister accompanying on the piano) in the two songs named above... on March 28, 1935.

• Whether she was then, Anita Duval or Nina Foresti is less the point than that Maria Callas absolutely definitely must have performed the Butterfly aria (again to piano accompaniment – was it Jackie? Who knows... she disavowed the Foresti name in her Stancioff meeting above) on April 07, 1935.

If Maria Callas wrote the original enquiry letter – there are too many similarities with her adult writing – for there to be any other conclusion, then EVERYTHING ELSE falls into place.

Whilst I cannot reconcile the 549 W 144 St address on the bottom LHS of the Foresti letter (with any evidence independently produced by me above), I do not necessarily 'buy' the Stancioff suggestion (above) that this is where the family lived at the time.

I've searched thirty books, but I do not discount it either. That said, there is no supporting material (that they lived on W 144 St.) so this Stancioff statement is NOT evidence. What IS possible (according to what by any standard is an extremely well researched 1981 book by Arianna Stassinopoulos), is that they lived at W 157 Street, post the 1929 'Crash' and it is suggested they did not move house again, until the mother and daughter left for Greece in early 1937.

Why did Callas put in a fictitious address? Well, I just do not know and that is pretty much the only lose end in my analysis of the Callas Foresti saga right now.

I did though, telephone my friend Jose Luis Luna (he befriended Maria from 1958 until 1977 – I have ALL his Callas signed photos here in folders and on the walls, in Sydney, together with many hours of taped 'phone conversations with The Diva in the twilight of her life (again, all here [on disk] in Sydney.) And I asked:

"Did you and or Maria ever discuss Major Bowes and Nina Foresti in any of your conversations, Jose?"

Answer: "No never, but I can tell you that when I met Meneghini in Sirmione in 1980, the year before he died, many many of his friends discussed that Foresti and Callas were one and the same. In fact, that was what you call, 'common knowledge' at the time."

Now, I do not for one second disbelieve anything of what my friend said to me on the telephone, but two days ago. Technically though, Jose's comments, being 'third party' as they are, are inadmissible hearsay – hearsay, however, that I completely believe.

But... sir... with everything else I've put together, to answer once and for all, one of the most vexing questions ever about mercurial Maria Callas (something I assert no one else on earth could conclude, given the uniquely fortunate position I am in), I want to know what game John Ardoin AND Joel Hoenig were playing with/on you. Now, you'll no longer have to write that part of your Ardoin/Callas interaction essay, since I've now done the very hardest part FOR YOU.

It's been a tough three days, but given your question, I was determined to give this essay the very best shot I could. Perhaps you are shocked you did not get the outcome you expected/wanted, but there you are!!

When you referred to your puzzlement that Ardoin lied to the Callas 'public' on purpose about Nina Foresti on the Major

Bowes program, you found it difficult to reconcile this sensational deception that Ardoin, given his revered status as a genuine Callas historian had pushed onto the world as being the truth.

*I'm having no option but to accept that you believed what you wrote, above. But being so close to Ardoin, I do not see how you could have been so easily deceived. Frankly, something makes absolutely NO sense right now, because I've had a damned good look and cannot, for the moment, find any holes in what I've put together here!! How could Ardoin laugh, crow and swagger so much, TO YOU IN PARTICULAR, when there was conclusive evidence 'out there' – published by Ardoin himself – that could easily bring him down, once explored in detail... as here. Very sincerely,
David (Crothers)*

PS. I do not like Ardoin, nor have I ever met him. A poor critic and an evil user – not far removed from the 'Colossus of All Evil' – The bitch Devetzi herself!!

Whilst my essay said many of the right things, I realise now that it was not sufficiently focussed... so I was not particularly dismayed when Roger's contact wrote me back a largely dismissive reply.

At the very least, my New York contact did not place much, if any worth, on the sections of the various books I had brought to his attention. Nor was he at all happy with my handwriting analysis... pointing out that I should seek the opinions of a genuine hand-writing expert! I concede that I was not the Callas hand-writing expert that I know I now am, but my arguments were nonetheless rather sloppy and probably over the top. Readers can see this for themselves, by referring back to the detailed text of my 2008 essay/email, because for all the so-called parallels I found in the Foresti page, my New York based 'counter-puncher' could find equally as many differences.

In other words, my 'proof' was nowhere even close to dissuading him from his entrenched opinion. This, by the way, something one often encounters in serious research and it is not attractive. I have always attempted to take a neutral or 'middle of the road' position, in any research I have been required to conduct,

in terms of achieving my academic credentials and I have never believed in disavowing this methodology in anything (particularly in terms of my two Callas essays already published in this Magazine) else I have needed to study.

There is no doubt that my original hand-writing analysis was not as sharp as I know it to be now and I agree that sloppiness will not do, when it comes to pontificating on the Maria Callas/Nina Foresti case. You will not find any that in the various pages that follow.

In any case, the New York writer goes on to raise the rhetorical question of that 'page' (the only real evidence I presented, in his mind) not being a genuine 1930's vintage document; essentially asking why no one had seriously considered it being worthwhile to investigate said document further. In other words, where did it really come from; what was its provenance?!

Now I'll readily concede that it has taken me eleven years to jump back on the Callas/Foresti bandwagon, but that is not for the sense that/because my New York correspondent had raised some extremely important questions here. As you read on, you will discover the serendipitous event that got me back into the game and I am very glad that I did, because I do have something new to say!

In any event, my interlocutor concluded his remarks by attacking the sound that actually came out of Nina Foresti's mouth, in that it had virtually no class and that it bore zero resemblance to the voice of the adult Maria Callas that we know and love. And how could such a classy musician sound so dreadful, way back then... especially as he was able to quote one particular child prodigy pianist who was as amazing then, as she subsequently became to the world later on. (See also my Addendum on page 24.)

That though, was a poor example to quote, because even though a female child's hands are inevitably smaller than those of an adult woman, the physical dexterity is already present. Frankly, I do not buy the pianist classical singer analogy, because Martha Argerich, for example, is seemingly playing as well as she always managed to do when she was young. It seems to me that arthritis striking a classical pianist's hands is quite another thing than old age attacking any

soprano's ability to sing as she did when young. Anyway, his claim to fame is piano playing criticism/comment, whereas I have always restricted myself to classical singing.

The essential question is: Was 'then' Maria Callas a dead in the water singer at age eleven who became, in my words, the most influential soprano of the 20th century – the only musical 'ugly duckling' who became the most divine swan, as so beautifully penned by Hans Christian Andersen? For my money, everything, and I mean everything, about Maria Callas is different and I will go on record here and now and say that Nina Foresti's performance of 'Un bel di' has always underwhelmed me.

But having said that, there is only one way to go and that is to let the evidence speak for itself. And that is what I am charged with doing here! Of course, I must give credit where credit is due and that is to my dearest friend Roger Gross. It was he who persuaded this US colleague to put in writing to me, his thesis that so-called pre-eminent opera critic John Ardoin actually was a devious out and out liar who went out of his way to profit from his sins... in essence, not just the street angel/house devil syndrome but a thoroughly nasty profit driven*) piece of work into the bargain. (In this context, evil is not too inappropriate a word... and of course 'you can't libel the dead'!

This of course is akin to the finest plate of food being placed in front of a genuine researcher like me; it tastes so bewitching that I will not rest without making the very best possible attempt at replicating the recipe and seeing where 'that' leads!

This American interlocutor's second email was an extremely important let-

*) This element of money has always played a significant part of Maria Callas' life, but not how readers might initially expect. Callas was always conscious that people might wish to take 'unfair' financial advantage of her fame. This is something that one observes on many occasions throughout her letters; to the extent that I believe I have noted 'elsewhere' that Callas as (also) very upset with Ardoin's review because it was in no small part driven by the money his controversial words would (additionally) reward him.

ter of reply and quite apart from the fact that I now knew that I had to get myself down to Washington, to The James Madison Building and into The Performing Arts Library and examine for myself all relevant documentation in their Major Bowes Amateur Hour collection, I also had to re-examine my own thought processes, in terms of the proper way forward in respect of all things related to 'Nina Foresti'.

I had a US correspondent who was expert in pianists/piano performance, saying that my research was not rigorous enough. He was right.

My first port of call should have been:

Person to Person

(Ed Morrow and Maria Callas – January 24, 1958; at The Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York City.)

Televised Interview (partial transcript)

.....begins.....

EM: But Madam Callas, you went to school in New York? What do you remember most about your school days?

MC: Very happy days, I must say. Carefree days. I remember that we had a principal who was very severe and he kept on saying: "Now children...self control. Remember that all your lives" I am (laughs) though it's hard sometimes to remember it.

And also, I used to sing each year for the graduation, you know. I was a little singer of the school. I sang operettas and I sang well... Chinese princes and sailors and other things like that as much as I can remember.

EM: Now tell me, did you ever get to sing on the radio in those days, when you were growing up?

MC: Yes, I won a few contests and I also practically won one. It was a program WOR. I wonder whether it was Major Bowes... I can't recall...but I know that The Master of Ceremonies was Jack Benny and I remember he was quite furious that I had not won the first prize.

EM: His judgement was good, even in his tender years. Is that right?

MC: Thanks. I haven't seen him since then. I wonder what he would think now?

.....continues.....

And my second: (See illustration at the right.)

- Ardoin, pre *The Callas Legacy* books.
- And with those references: Ed Murrow (1958); Jellinek (1960); Frost (1970); Fein (1976) and Ardoin (also 1976)...
- ...I should have posed the one and only relevant question at the time: "Do you believe that Maria Callas sang on the Major Bowes Amateur Hour programme?"
- Even Jackie Callas (when she came to London in October 1991, with her husband, at the invitation of *The Maria Callas International Club* for a dinner/meet and greet/question and answer session) clearly acknowledged on camera that her sister did in fact participate on one of the Major Bowes radio programmes.

Partial interview with Madam Jackie Stathopoulos-Callas and her husband, Dr Andreas Stathopoulos on Tuesday, 8 October 1991

Jeanne Handzic: The Nina Foresti concert(s) when Maria was young. Ehm... there is quite some controversy about that, Jackie. I wonder if I could ask Richard to put the question to you rather better than I can please. Would you mind, Richard?

Richard Copeman: Yes, I would like to ask her about her career when she was singing as a child of 11 years... [Jackie interrupts (not audible?)] ...and you were playing the piano for her.

Jackie Callas: I was playing the piano. You know who she admired? Rosa Ponselle.

R.C.: Ah yes.

J.C.: Oh..., we knew the family you know. We knew her family er... and we used to go there and hear those records of Rosa Ponselle and Maria says: I'm going to be more famous than her. Imagine?! She had a great [Inaudible] I mean a great dramatic person she was. And they used to laugh. Imagine that this small girl says that she will be better than Rosa Ponselle. And she loved Rosa Ponselle. [Inaudible] my mother used to take her to the

library, you know, because we couldn't buy all the records to hear. And she used to hear by hours. She wanted... to love.

Jeanne Handzic: When she gave the concert giving her name as we understand as Nina Foresti there seems to be some queries as to whether that's in that particular interview; correct me if I'm wrong.

J.C.: Who?

R.C.: Well did you know there was/she was in a programme called The Major Bowes Amateur Hour?

J.C.: Ah yes, that is when she was ten years old.

R.C.: Yes! Well did you know that they have discovered the recordings of those radio programmes?! I have it here.

J.C.: Really?

R.C.: Yes but... It wasn't in her own...

J.C.: It was all children you know other (made) speakers, others piano, they played, others sang. My sister sang 'A heart that's free'. I used to accompany her on that. [Laughs and smiles]

R.C.: Did she sing with her own name or did she give her another name or what?

J.C.: I think her own.

R.C.: Really! Because there is a letter which is signed Nina Foresti and nobody knows

THE LIFE

Maria Callas has a reputation as a fighter, but those who know her well have found that she is surprisingly shy and, in many unsuspected ways, insecure. To this day, she often masks her insecurities with the cover of aloofness.

Much of her uncertainty can be traced to childhood, when she was overweight and felt herself in competition with an older sister for their mother's affection. The third child of Evangelia and George Kalogeropoulos, Callas was born Cecilia Sophia Anna Maria at Fifth Avenue Hospital in New York City only a few months after the family's emigration from Greece. Shortly before the family left Athens, a three-year-old son had died. Evangelia desperately hoped for another boy for the life just beginning in America. The birth of Callas on December 3, 1923, was a profound disappointment, and at first the mother refused to see the baby. Though she eventually accepted the new daughter, it must have been dismaying to see the child grow up at first in a shapeless and clumsy manner.

By the age of eight, Maria had begun piano lessons and showed herself to be unusually gifted musically. Even before formal study began, she would pick melodies out on the piano; by the age of ten she sang arias from *Carmen* and a few ballads, including "La paloma" and a song called "The Heart Is Free." Evangelia started to promote her younger daughter's talent with the classic zeal of a stage mother; this led to the first of many arguments with her husband concerning the child. George Callas—for he had shortened the family name after arriving in America—felt Maria was being pushed too quickly. The mother's ambition, however, overrode her husband's objections, and this ambition soon became as necessary to Maria's identity as to Evangelia's. Not only did singing provide an outlet for gaining her mother's approval and attention, but it was a means of combating a shy, introverted nature—partly brought on by the quarrelsome nature of her parents—and the embarrassment of thick-lensed glasses. (Callas, unable to tolerate contact lenses, still wears heavy glasses in private.) Singing also took Maria's mind off her weight. "My sister Jackie was a beautiful girl," she has said, "but I was very fat and full of pimples. I was also much too mature for my age and not very happy. I certainly was the ugly duckling."

In 1934, in Chicago, Callas took part in a nationwide amateur contest hosted by Jack Benny. She lost to an accordion player but was given a wristwatch as a consolation prize. During this time, Mary Ann, as she was then called, attended public school in New York's Washington Heights and there won a role in the school's production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. Other contests followed, including the Major Bowes Amateur Hour. In 1937, Evangelia, still the central force behind Callas's growing ambitions as a singer, decided to return to Greece with her two daughters. In Athens, Maria's voice could be properly trained and her life directed without George Callas's objections.

whether this is her or whether it is somebody else. But if we play the record maybe you can say whether. Is the tape recorder here?

J.H.: No.

J.C.: [Inaudible] ...her name.

J.H.: I'll ask the last question and then...

R.C.: Because also she talks well this little girl on the programme, she says that her father is a chemist and eh, she sings a bit of 'Un bel di'.

J.C.: No. 'A heart that's free', a certain song, 'A heart that's free', a certain waltz it was, you know.

R.C.: Did she make many appearances on the radio?

J.C.: No no no, only then. She had just begun to sing.

J.H.: Madam Callas, the last official question and then perhaps you'd be kind enough to answer more whilst we find the cassette and then we listen to yourself singing.

J.C.: Yes.

[...]

J.H.: Would you like to hear a little bit of the Nina Foresti... a moment of Nina Foresti?

J.C.: Yes. [Tape machine is placed directly in front of Jackie]

Callas/Foresti: Well my ambitions were very high... [the banter that we all know, continues...]

Bowes: So you want to sing something from Puccini, right?

Callas/Foresti: Yes, I would like to...

Bowes: Yes I thought so; they all do. All right then, what do you want to sing?

Callas/Foresti: Something from *Madama Butterfly*, but abbreviated.

Bowes: All right; go ahead.

J.C.: Why he said Puccini? Maria did not know how to sing then.

J.H.: Is this Maria?

J.C.: That's not... [Inaudible] ...is that the voice of a girl? Impossible. It's not true. Is it possible a ten-year-old girl to sing this?

J.C.: We don't know.

Andreas Stathopoulos: [Interrupts] How old was she?

J.C.: Ten years, ten. Ten years old girl to sing this. Why they do this? No... First of all, my sister sang a small song 'A heart that's free'. Ten years old. She had just begun.

A.S.: That must be a trick.

J.C.: That's a trick. It's not her voice first of all. [Listens for about eight seconds and then says:] There's nothing similar to her voice. I don't mean for ten years old... and later. [Listens more and then says:] It's not true. Who did this; it's not true?

A.S.: This person is trying to imitate the Ma-

ria style singing, but she fails.

J.C.: One moment; a ten-year-old girl can never sing this.

A.S.: My colleague will agree with me that the cords of a ten years old girl cannot produce this sound. You agree?

J.C.: It's impossible, a girl ten years old to sing all this. [Inaudible] First of all, it's not her voice. Maria is my sister and I know her life.

* * *

In summary, what do I say in conclusion to my findings in respect of the relationship between Maria and Jackie Callas when they were children:

- As with everything else in life, both ladies make honest mistakes about dates and places that we researchers/readers want clarified.
- Both Maria and Jackie have made quite several honest mistakes about Maria's childhood performances.
- I cannot yet put my finger on what, at the time, was the relationship between Litza and the 'musical' advancement of her two daughters, but Jackie's visit to London, clearly discloses (to me) that Jackie just did not know about the extent of her mother's pursuit of her younger sister's singing development.
- There is no perceived animosity/jealousy here, but my personal reading of the facts as presented, is that Maria was very quickly advancing, whilst Jackie was content doing other things.
- Jackie got trapped in her thinking, in constantly saying that her sister was only ten-years-old, when she stated at the outset, that by the age of eleven, Maria was becoming an accomplished singer.
- That, however, has to be water under the proverbial bridge and we can, indeed we must, forget for the moment, what Jackie had to say following this admission about her sister.

What we have proved at this juncture, is that Maria Callas did in fact appear on the Major Bowes Amateur Hour programme. Callas said so – *twice* – on camera; her sister said so too – on camera, so that alone ought to be enough to meet any academic standard for proof. Jellinek, in his first book in 1960, said so and in Ardoin's first book (with Gerald Fitzgerald) in 1974, entitled *CALLAS* he not only said so, but Maria Callas herself hand signed my copy here in Sydney.

So... let's just put it to bed once and for all: Maria callas did indeed sing on the Major Bowes Amateur Hour programme!

As what/when/with whom/add your own question... that does not matter right now. It's not what she sang, it's that she sang. Those readers/members who do not agree with this argument, might as well stop reading right now and use this (additional) time for an academically acceptable rebuttal article, to be uploaded to our next Magazine, because once my fundamental point is accepted, there is nowhere for anyone to move... save to follow the evidence at hand. Once you are on-board, you are on-board, so to speak!

Once all the argument that has preceded this point, is accepted, 'we' can and should move on:

- As I wrote at the outset, my 2008 email exchange was with what I understand was a well-regarded musical scholar, particularly in the field of classical piano.
- His points to me in those two original emails about John Ardoin essentially confessing (certainly as I read it) on his death bed to perpetrating something entirely nefarious as regards Maria Callas and Nina Foresti, have been deeply troubling for ten plus years now.
- He though, did not go so far as to say that Ardoin never did the research, he said he did (in the original and subsequent *Callas Legacy* books) but yours truly was getting a certain sense from the two emails, particularly given the comment...
- ...that Ardoin had told him face to face, just how exceedingly glad he was that he had purposely manufactured/thought out the entire Foresti saga from beginning to end and that this was first-hand information and nothing less!
- ...that Ardoin had faked the Foresti letter (plus the formal application page) together with the entire relating story and somehow, smuggled in the written text(s) into The James Maddison Performing Arts Library in Washington DC.
- The simple emerging fact in my mind was: 'When next you are in the USA, you have to travel to Washington and get yourself down to The Performing Arts Library and find out what you find out for yourself!'
- This, I remind readers, was in 2008 and this essay is being written in 2019.

you have it in better or more sound than me.
Best, Pablo.

July 24, 1999

Dear Pablo,

I no longer have the original Foresti tape. I only have what you issued and the EMI issue. Sorry. I'll send along the Tosca tapes soon.

Best, John

November 22, 1999

Hello John,

May I ask you about what Callas told you about 'Un bel di' – if you talked about it?

Thanks!

Pablo.

November 23, 1999

Dear Pablo,

Maria simply denied. Said she never sang under any name but her own.

The hell of this Nina Foresti thing is that the speaking voice is hers. Not the singing voice. I suppose you know the Stancioff and Linakis (Maria's cousin) books. They never have met, yet each in their own way corroborated that fact that Maria was Nina.

What to be believe. I am not sure we can ever be 100 per cent. But maybe 95 per cent!

Best, John

March 1, 2000

Dear John,

I hope you are well.

In your message of November 1999, you say that Nadia Stancioff and Stephan Linakis have never met. Both of them corroborated that Maria Callas was Nina Foresti on that 1935 Major Bowes audition. Stancioff even goes far writing Callas' words in her book: "I called myself Anita Duval. That way my father wouldn't find out. Afterwards I switched to Nina Foresti".

I have been thinking... why did Stancioff and Linakis make those statements, what do you think? What were their reasons – why would have they corroborated the truth? Thank you very much for your answer.

Best, Pablo.

March 1, 2000

Dear Pablo,

I do not know Linakis, so can't answer for him except to say that the most he knew about Maria was her early years (he saw her little after that), and I guess her being on the radio stuck in his mind. It would have certainly set her apart from other kids her

age.

I do know Nadia well. She told me she had never met Linakis, and that the matter of the name came up one day with Maria when she happens to mention that she occasionally used an alias for writing or avoiding someone and the name she used was 'Du Bois'. Maria immediately made the connection with 'Foresti' and told Nadia how she had sung under that name as a child.

I read the findings about the Buenos Aires Turandot and thought them fascinating. The strongest evidence in my mind is Arizmendi not recognizing her voice, and Arnosi saying del Monaco never took the high C in Act 2 (I presume he was at all four performances). So I guess I was wrong. But it certainly still sounds convincing to me. Best, John

March 6, 2000

Dear John,

Do you still have a copy of the letter that begins with "My musical studies? were to begin when..." and the one you publish in your book that "begins" with "...the writer is a young soprano...?"

Thanks in advance,

Pablo.

March 6, 2000

Dear Pablo,

I have only page 2. Never got page one back from the publisher.

John

March 6, 2000

Dear John,

I suppose that there isn't any possibility of finding a copy around, isn't? Where is the original? Best,

Pablo.

March 7, 2000

Dear Pablo,

Of Foresti's letter, all I ever had was a photostat of the original given me by an old gentleman who had been Bowes' assistant and who had all the tapes and papers connected with the competition. This was back in the early 60s. I don't remember his name but I do remember he had an office in Rockefeller Centre (I think I found him in the phone book by looking under Major Bowes). I also remember that he had transferred all the original acetates of the programs to tape and they were stored at his home somewhere outside Manhattan. He first provided me with a list of ever one who appeared on

the program within the years I requested (which I think was 1934-36) and a list of what they sang, and then he brought to NY tapes of anything I asked for. We heard them in his office, and the only possibility I found was Nina Foresti, whose tape he copied for me and also made photostats of her letter of application and the information sheet kept by the auditioners ("Faint possibility for future"). I seriously doubt if he is still alive and have no idea what he might have done with the Bowes archives. This was nearly 40 years ago.

I gave my photostat of page 2 of the letter to Scribner's who as you know, reproduced it in 1982 edition of the Legacy and never returned it to me. So all I now have is the photostat of page 1 and the Bowes' information sheet.

Let me say that I would still have serious doubts about the singing – not the speaking – voice if it were not for Stancioff and Linakis. I was never troubled by the bit of "working in the toy department of a large NY store" and singing Nedda in Pagliacci. I know this was enough for Petsalis to dismiss Nina Foresti as Callas in his superb book on her Greek years (which is coming out in English this spring from Amadeus Press). But I always felt if Foresti was Callas then these were obvious lies to make her resume sound more impressive. But what got me was her father having a drugstore, and the trip to Florida. But above I believed her speaking voice. It is a mature voice, while the singing voice is obviously immature. But on the other hand, there is Jackie Callas' explicit denial of the whole Foresti thing. Will this tangled mystery ever be unravelled? I tend to doubt it.

Best, John

March 7, 2000

Dear John,

What a wonderful investigative work you did!!! I am happy to know the Details.

Do you still have the tape?

Could you send me a copy of the photostat?

I agree with you, the content of the letter would not be used to refuse the possibility of Nina Foresti as Callas. Best, Pablo.

March 16, 2000

Hello John,

Many thanks for the photocopies!!!

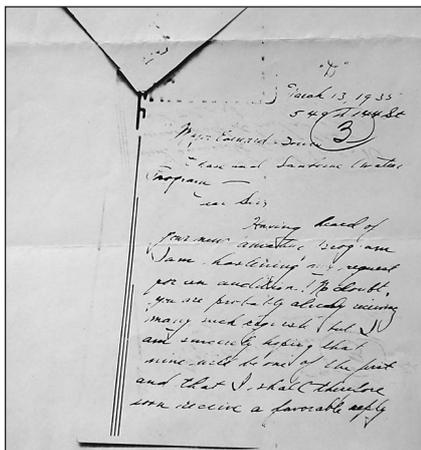
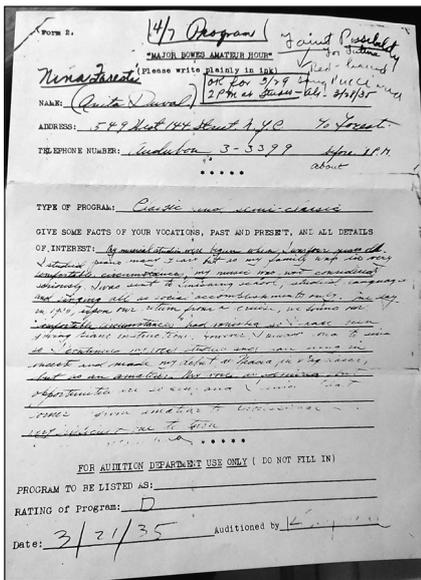
Do you mind if I use them in the pressed issue of DVN-I?

Thanks for all, Pablo.

March 16, 2000
Not at all,
John

As you can read in the emails, page 2 is lost because he sent it to the publisher and never sent back. It is strange that Ardoin did not make a copy before he sent it. Perhaps both papers he sent me are also the original copies he received.
Best, Pablo

And if you are still reading (and reeling from shock from the above exchange), Pablo provided me with the proof. [Here!](#)



So... let's cut to the chase and very quickly at that:

- Berruti's email exchange above answers every query raised in my first email exchange of 12 May 2008 with the American musicologist... the one who has restricted me, in terms of reproducing his exact words here.
- Ardoin, despite all his supposed faults, is not the dreadful person this American gentleman suspected him to be, in so far as his 'death-bed' confession as regards the Nina Foresti conspiracy, is just 'his' final effort at self-promotion prior to his death.
- We know exactly how Ardoin obtained 'these' photostats and even more importantly... that he did actually do the Major Bowes research that he said he did.
- The revelation, at least to me, was that Ardoin did not actually ever go to The Performing Arts Library in Washington...
- ...so, all I had to do, was to get myself 'down there' and see the collection for myself!
- Obviously, I wanted to be able to find the originals of 'these three paper documents' if I could and if they were actually 'there' and given that Pablo's email exchange with Ardoin, basically addressed all the queries that the American's email to me had... I was optimistic as to what I would find.

It was all set. After an extensive trip to the southern-most tip of Patagonia/Tierra del Fuego with my younger son... once back in New York, my very first expedition was an Amtrak day-trip to Washington:

- The Major Bowes collection is very well documented on The Library of Congress website.
- I spent six hours there, going through every possibly relevant box of material, which I must assure everyone, is extremely extensive.
- And I was assisted all the way, by Paul



and James, two of the most courteous and involved librarians I have ever encountered in what has essentially been a life of research.

Amateur Hour Collection
Guides to Special Collections in the Music Division of the Library of Congress


LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Music Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
20540
Revised 2010 March

Contact information:
http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/music/perform_contact

Additional search options available at:
<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/music/cadmus/mu004002>

LC Online Catalog record:
<http://ecn.loc.gov/2010563506>

Processed by the Music Division of the Library of Congress

Collection Summary

Title: Amateur Hour Collection
Span Dates: 1934-1948
Call No: ML3.L4
Creator: Bowes, Edward, Major, 1874-1946
Size: circa 8500 items ; 29 boxes ; 9 linear feet
Language: Collection material in English
Location: Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Summary: Primarily over 7000 applications from contestants who appeared on the Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour radio program between 1934 and 1948. A small percentage of the administrative papers dating from the late 1940s and 1950s, as well as materials relating to the Mexican version of the program, *La Hora Internacional del Aficionado*, are also included. Filed with the contestant applications are letters of introduction, reference letters, and other documents sent by prospective contestants. Applications from conventional performers such as musicians, dancers, singers, and impersonators are the most numerous, but also included are applications from novelty acts such as a burlesque piece, a group of hand-standing singers, and a group who played harmonicas with fire extinguishers. Of particular interest are applications from various performers, now well-known, including Teresa Brewer, Shubby Kaye, Robert Merrill, Beverly Sills, and Frank Sinatra. Photographs from the 1940s and 1950s provide a visual record of the show, while correspondence to and from program staff members recount some of the program's business transactions. Scripts, promotional material, and advertising and sponsor documents are also part of the collection.

Agency Sketch

Date	Event
April 1934	First radio broadcast of Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour on WHN, New York
1935	William Edward Maguire (stage name Ted Mack) joins Bowes as emcee and talent scout
March 24, 1935	Coast to coast broadcast on NBC radio with Chase & Sanborn as sponsor
June 1935	Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour is named the most listened to radio program in the United States
Sept. 8, 1935	The Hoboken Four, featuring Frank Sinatra, performs on the Original Amateur Hour program

Scope and Content Note

The records of the Amateur Hour Collection consist primarily of over 7,000 applications from contestants who appeared on the Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour radio program between 1934 and 1948. The remainder of the materials in the collection are administrative papers dating from the late 1940s and 1950s. Although only a small percentage of the administrative papers of the organization, they are worthy of note in that they provide some insight into the way in which the Original Amateur Hour program was run. Material relating to the Mexican version of the program, *La Hora Internacional del Aficionado*, are also included.

The Amateur Hour collection is represented by twelve series. The first series is **CONTESTANTS** consists primarily of over 7,000 applications from contestants who appeared on the Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour radio program between 1934 and 1948. This series is divided into three subseries: Contestant applications; Contestant biographical sketches; Lists of performers.

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX-FOLDER 1/1-16/6	Contestants Applications and other related materials of contestants for the Amateur Hour. The majority of which pertain specifically to the Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour radio program between 1934 and 1948. Arrangement is in three subseries: Contestant applications; Contestant biographical sketches; Lists of Performers.
BOX 1-15	Contestant applications, related correspondence and documents Applications from contestants who appeared on the Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour radio program between 1934 and 1948. Arranged in alphabetical order by name.
BOX-FOLDER 16/1-2	Contestants' biographical sketches Brief biographical sketches of contestants who appeared on the Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour radio program between 1934 and 1948. Arranged alphabetically order by name.
BOX-FOLDER 16/3-5	Lists of performers Typewritten lists of performers from the Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour. Arranged in alphabetical order by nationality.

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX-FOLDER 1/1-16/6	Contestants Applications and other related materials of contestants for the Amateur Hour. The majority of which pertain specifically to the Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour radio program between 1934 and 1948. Arrangement is in three subseries: Contestant applications; Contestant biographical sketches; Lists of Performers.
BOX 1-15	Contestant applications, related correspondence and documents Applications from contestants who appeared on the Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour radio program between 1934 and 1948. Arranged in alphabetical order by name.

BOX-FOLDER 19/14 **Printed Programs of Performances, 1934-1954, undated**
Amateur Hour programs from various productions throughout its history. Arrangement is chronological by date

Over a six-hour continuous period after my 6.45 am departure from Penn Central Station. (See illustration at the right.)

I went through each and every application letter in the entire history of the Major Bowes radio programme, including (obviously) every letter starting with C (Callas), D (Duval), F (Foresti) and K (Kallos/Kalogeropoulou).

"D"

March 13, 1935
549 West 144 St.
3

Major Edward Bowes
Chase and Sanborne Amateur Program

Dear Sir,

Having heard of your new "amateur program" I am hastening my request for an audition. No doubt, you are probably already receiving many such requests but I am sincerely hoping that mine will be one of the first and that I shall therefore soon receive a favorable reply.

The writer is a young soprano who has studied music and singing several years. Competent judges have pronounced my voice beautiful but with all that, it is so very difficult to find an opening, an opportunity for a real test to prove exactly what I can do. Your amateur hour, I hope, may answer this need.

Eagerly awaiting your reply, I remain,

Very sincerely,
Quita Duval

S. Foresti
549 West 144 St.
N.Y.C.

Sadly, I did not find any smoking gun – a photograph of an eleven-year-old Nina Foresti with Major Bowes himself (actually, the paucity of actual photos in the collection was amazing) – but I did find the very next best thing(s):

- The originals of the Nina Foresti application letter and Form 2, application form.
- They were sitting neatly, second from the bottom

Container	Contents
BOX-FOLDER 15:5	Yaffe to Zyde
BOX-FOLDER 16:1-2	Contestants' biographical sketches Brief biographical sketches of contestants who appeared on the Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour radio program between 1934 and 1948. Arranged alphabetically order by name
BOX-FOLDER 16:1	All Girl Swing Band to One Man Band
BOX-FOLDER 16:2	Kathleen Ray to Frances White
BOX-FOLDER 16:3-5	Lists of performers Typescript lists of performers from the Amateur Hour. Arranged in alphabetical order by nationality

AMTRAK eTicket
PRESENT THIS DOCUMENT FOR BOARDING

RESERVATION NUMBER 6AF800

NYP → WAS Round-Trip
NEW YORK PENN. NY WASHINGTON, DC APRIL 3, 2019

Depart	NEW YORK PENN STATION - WASHINGTON 1 Business Class Seat	DEPARTS	ARRIVES (Wed Apr 3)
51	Apr 3, 2019	6:45 AM	10:10 AM

Return	WASHINGTON - NEW YORK PENN STATION 1 Business Class Seat	DEPARTS	ARRIVES (Wed Apr 3)
138	Apr 3, 2019	5:55 PM	9:30 PM

LIBRARY PERFORMING ARTS READING ROOM
PRESS FIRMLY • CORRECT, LEGIBLE NAME AND READER ID CARD NO. REQUIRED

CALL NUMBER: AUTHOR/COMPOSER
AMATEUR HOUR COLLECTION

VOLUME AND/OR DATE: BOOK/SERIAL/MUSIC/TITLE
BOX FOLDER 3/5 DOUGHERTY to Dynamic HARMONICA FOUR

DESK NO: FULL NAME
B11 DAVID CRITCHES

READER ID CARD NO. 2887

MUSIC DIVISION STAFF USE ONLY

Not on Shelf (See Verso) In Recorded Sound Ref. Center, LM 113
 Verify Call Number In Folio/Reading Room, LJ G49
 Give Volume Number/Date In General Collections
 Too Fragile to Serve See Verso for Message

1434 (2018/11)

in Box 3/5 and I have to admit that this was one of the Eureka moments in my entire life!

FORM 2.

"MAJOR BOWES AMATEUR HOUR"
(Please write plainly in ink)

Name: Quita Duval Faint possibility for Foresti
Red-haired
4/17 Program
OK for 3/29
2 PM at Studio - 44 - 3/29/35

Address: 549 West 144 Street, N.Y.C. To Foresti.

Telephone Number: Audubon 3-5399 before 1 P.M.
about

TYPE OF PROGRAM: Classic and semi-classic

GIVE SOME FACTS OF YOUR VOCATIONS, PAST AND PRESENT, AND ALL DETAILS OF INTEREST: My musical studies were begun when I was four years old. I studied piano many years but so my family was in very temporary circumstances, my music was not considered seriously. I was sent to finishing school, studied languages and singing all as social accomplishments only. One day in 1930, upon our return from a cruise, we found our "temporary" circumstances had vanished so I have been giving piano instructions. However, I always tried to sing so I continued my vocal studies and have sung in concert and made my debut in Pappas, but as an amateur. My voice is promising but opportunities are so few and I find that come from amateur to professional is very difficult one to turn.

Puccini and

FOR AUDITION DEPARTMENT USE ONLY (DO NOT FILL IN)

PROGRAM TO BE LISTED AS: _____

RATING of Program: D

Date: 3/21/35 Auditioned by Seayman

• Fortunately, there was no one else in the reading room at the time I found these papers, save me and the two guys on the front desk.

• It will surprise no one that they were very quickly to my side when I let out a proverbial yelp of total satisfaction! (That sort of thing just does not happen in The Library of Congress Performing Arts Library.)

• Dear readers, I had absolutely no idea what I was or was not going to find in the Major Bowes archives... but, logically...

• ...if the Nina Foresti letters were not there, then John Ardoin had masterminded a scrupulously awful deception as it directly related to Nina Foresti and that would mean that my New York correspondent was right...

• ...if the Nina Foresti letters were there, but looked to be modern (or not vintage/ of the period) then once again, my New York correspondent was (also) right...

• ...if the Nina Foresti correspondence was there and looked to be right, then all the inuendo emailed to me about how dreadful a person Ardoin was, would be indisputably wrong.

Now you know exactly what I am going to say next, because this is the 'denouement' after an eleven-year period of waiting and (yes) wanting.

• The two pieces of paper were sitting there – possibly never purposefully looked at and examined in more than eighty years, in all their originality as I found them on 3 April 2019.

• And after so long, I am delighted to present them on this page, in colour, for your observation and enjoyment.

This letter itself as presented, is very much in the Callas style of writing formation. (The writing paper itself comes with the central fold already 'there' so to speak; wherein the writer commences on the 'cover page' and then writes 'page two' on the right-hand side of the opened format page.) I have several formal Callas letters in exactly the same order... with a four-page continuation, including page three on the back of page one and page four on the back of page two. It measures exactly 14 x 17.5 cm, in four-page format.

Page one of this letter contains the previously never-before seen purplish official 'Bowes' 'ANSWERED' stamp. That then must mean that the 549 West 144th

St. address had some significance, because it produced 'Nina Foresti' in the Bowes offices to complete the registration process. (Note that no contact telephone number is seen from Ms Foresti, until she reaches the Bowes offices and appends the Audubon NYC telephone number.)

The transcribed text is as follows:

"D"

March 13, 1935

549 W. 144 St.

Major Edward Bowes

Chase and Sanborne Amateur Program –

Dear Sir,

Having heard of your new amateur program I am hastening my request for an audition! No doubt, you are probably already receiving many such requests but I am sincerely hoping that mine will be one of the first and that I shall therefore soon receive a favorable reply.

The writer is a young soprano who has studied music and singing several years. Competent judges have pronounced my voice beautiful but with all that, it is very difficult to find an opening, an opportunity for a real test to prove exactly what I can do. Your amateur hour I hope, may answer this need.

Eagerly awaiting your reply, I remain.

c/o Foresti
549 West 144 St.
N.Y.C.

Very sincerely,
Anita Duval

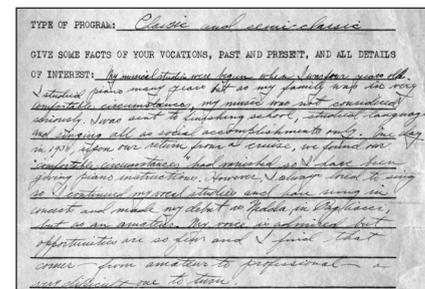
Form B. paper/page utilises much more flimsy paper than is seen on the formal letter. It measures 21.6 x 28 cm and is exactly the same size as the multiple other 1930's entry forms (Form B.) (See previous page and back cover.)

The transcribed hand written text is as follows:

"My musical studies were begun when I was four years old. I studied piano many years but as my family was in very comfortable circumstances, my music was not considered seriously. I was sent to finishing school, studied languages and singing all as social accomplishments only. One day in 1930, upon our return from a cruise, we found our 'comfortable circumstances' had vanished so I have been giving piano instruction. However, I always loved to sing so I continued my vocal studies and have sung in concerts and made my debut as Nedda, in Pagliacci, but as an amateur. My voice is admired but opportunities are so few and I

find that corner – from amateur to professional – a very difficult one to turn.

In other words, this fully filled-out form is as genuine as the Major Bowes Amateur Hour forms get and is completed in the very same handwriting as exhibited on the formal initial application letter.



I am afraid that I must now come down very hard on my New York correspondent's comment (in reply to my original email):

• It says, inter alia, that the only 'evidence' I have produced to substantiate my case is that page two of the original Foresti letter and he then goes on to criticise various other assertions of mine as regards the handwriting thereon, admitting by the way that he has no expertise in handwriting analysis, himself.

• He also goes on to poke holes in my analysis, because I have not paid any attention to provenance and thus the real possibility of fakery being involved.

• I have already conceded that my original email in reply was too sloppy and not nearly as focussed/rigorous as it should have been.

• This is no defence, but I must admit that my enthusiasm must have gotten in the way of rigour in my contact's eyes. I had never received so interesting an email about Callas, since one of my other long-term correspondents wrote me:

• She isn't rare; just expensive, since demand exceeds the very generous supply the Nina Foresti letter.

• The reality though, was that I was verging on being a Callas handwriting expert, back then in the mid-2000's; these days I am in no doubt that I am such an expert and have a website devoted to that very topic.

• Having worked in and under academia for much of my post-graduate tertiary education life, I inevitably knew (and was able to spot) perceived bias in writ-

ten text.

- It (sadly) happens all the time and (that) my American correspondent was not happy that I had not agreed with his belief that Ardoin had actually been pulling the proverbial wool over the eyes of the unsuspecting and ever-loving Callas public.
- He wanted to write a story, exposing Ardoin for being an out and out fraudster, but was accusing me of a set position that basically contradicted his stance.
- Of course, he produced no evidence (quite distinct to my hard work going through the evidence as I encountered it at the time) and followed 'this' up with the statement that the man who absolutely knew just how evil Ardoin had been to the memory of Callas, had gone and died on him!
- This gentleman then remained silent for the ensuing eleven years, until I gave him the courtesy of saying that I was preparing 'this' essay on 11 June.
- Anyhow, it is what it is and if he is wanting to register the copyright of his exact words to me in an eleven-year-old twin email burst, then the very best of good luck to him.
- In my opinion, this is a complete and total waste of money, because my forced revisions have focused my mind to a significantly greater extent... so that I am far happier with this revised result as it refers to those two original emails.
- More importantly, I believe this individual has brought certain ridicule upon himself for saying that to his trained eye, he saw just as much that was different in Nina Foresti's youthful handwriting style as I saw being the same...
- ...because, by way of criticism, Callas in 1935 had no idea what her handwriting would look like when she was an adult!
- Readers here, should go back and read the partial interview transcript with Jackie Stathopoulos-Callas and her husband on page 14 of this essay.
- The Club members present at this London meeting provided the couple with an audio tape of the Foresti audition...
- ...and after Jackie completely rejects it as being the voice of her sister, the husband interrupts: "This person is trying to imitate the Maria style singing, but she fails."
- This statement, in and of itself, ought to have been challenged on the spot, because of its patently ridiculous content:

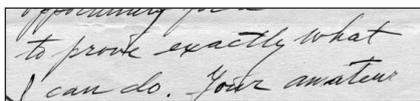
How can an eleven year old know how she will sound, ten years hence etc.

- The trouble though is that the obsequious nature of the then Club members 'questioning' of the honoured guests, at the time, precluded anything remotely serious.
- Indeed, it still makes one cringe... almost twenty years later... and it was a one in a lifetime opportunity lost!
- The point in any case, is that the husband's opinion is tragically in line with the New York correspondent's comment about the sameness and differences as between an eleven year old and this person's adult handwriting.

Ipso facto, since the youngster's handwriting is only in a formative stage, it is much more logical to search for similar styles than to go about attempting to focus on differences. Indeed, such a process is just about as illogical as one can possibly get.

Further, on Callas' handwriting, our New York 'expert' has not taken account of this astoundingly similar letter formation and that is Callas' unique way of dealing with the lower-case letter 'x':

See her formation as an eleven-year-old and then as an adult:



There is absolutely no doubt but the fact that the x's in both scans (though done fourteen years apart) are penned by the same mind.

In addition, I (also) went to great trouble, here in Australia, to satisfy myself that the letters in question found in The Library of Congress could be and were penned by an eleven-year-old child:

- This point does not appear to have been of any particular concern to the various 'Foresti naysayers', but for the record, I spoke to a battery of eighty-year-old Catholic nuns in Sydney, all of whom were school teachers...
- ...and who were thus in primary school not more than fourteen years prior to Callas being at such and 'early' education level, herself.

• These elderly ladies confirm that cursive writing skills were very seriously taught in the 1930's and that girls (in particular) were encouraged to have properly constructed ink pen writing skills by the age of eleven, before they entered high school at age twelve or thereabouts, the following year.

• It is worth pointing out too that Callas was an extremely near-sighted young woman and subsequently though out all her entire adult life.

• There are multiple videos of her holding 'script' up close to her face to determine what exactly was written (thereon) and also of the slow and careful way in which she inscribed anything.

• She was not a scribbler... and it is fair to say that this Nina Foresti was not a scribbler either. Her letters were both confidently, albeit carefully, put together and that I respectfully submit, is consistent with a child who had to wear glasses throughout her life.

• This very afternoon, my French neighbours, who are about to return to France after four years here, were with me to say their good-bye's.

• The wife (Annie) has been a primary school teacher all her working life and was very keen to take a close look at my scans from Washington DC.

• The French, have a 'strange' way of agreeing to something, in that it inevitably involves their mouths and shoulders...

• ...so Annie just pursed her lips, shrugged her shoulders and said: "Of course, this is exactement 'ow we teach our seven year olds in Australia and in France. They 'ave to be fluent with a pen before they enter high school... yes! T'is girl, she was a very careful write... no?!"

• Yes Annie, she wore glasses for short-sightedness.

• Of course!

I would like to address a couple of final points before I close this Callas/Foresti case for ever. These relate to the footnotes in Nicholas Petsalis-Diomidis' superb book on Callas' early years in Greece, which Ardoin commented upon, in his 7 March 2000 email exchange with Berruti. Ardoin commented that it was due out in English, that spring and he was right when he commented so favourably about the tome, because in my opinion it is the best researched book on

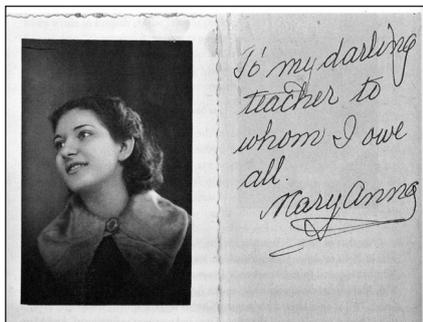
Callas ever to have appeared.

That Petsalis (RIP) dismisses the view that Callas and Foresti were one and the same is less important than the brilliant footnotes he delivered. This one in particular, is relevant to our discussions today:

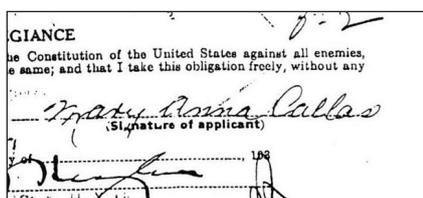
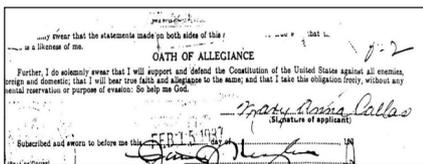
10. J. Ardoin, *The Callas Legacy*, London 1988, 1-3. Although Ardoin first presented the case as no more than a hypothesis, which gradually came to be accepted as fact, it seems that he later came around to believing in his discovery. On seeing in MARCHAND (16) that the handwriting on Foresti's entry form was not Mary's, he wrote, "This earliest example of Callas's handwriting is certainly not the same as that of her application letter for the *Major Bowes Amateur Hour*, two years earlier. It is obvious that this letter... was, as I long suspected, written by either her mother or a friend." (J. Ardoin, "Maria Callas: The Early Years," *Opera Quarterly* 3, no. 2, summer 1985.) A transcript of Foresti's dialogue with Major Bowes is given in "La Callas Speaks," *The Callas Circle*, no. 1, Nov. 1994.

Ardoin is wrong on several grounds here though he can be forgiven for these mistakes.

- I do not possess a copy of the Marchand book, but Karl does and explains to me that the reference to Marchand refers explicitly to 'this' photo in that book:



This picture (which I have always suspected as regards its provenance [none]) was supposedly done in spring 1939 but that is not the earliest example of her handwriting, save the Nina Foresti-Bowes application. Petsalis must have suffered some sort of a brain-storm, because his very own book published the very first, absolutely genuine example of Callas' signature. And that was on her 'Oath of Allegiance' certificate:



Here, I am making a statement of fact:

- The capital M in this example above, is infinitely more consistent with the capital M on the Major Bowes letter (either March 13, 1935 or Major Edward Bowes) than that highly suspicious M on the supposed Trivella dedication.
- And I've noticed that the second L in Callas (above) is taller than the first one – a general first go-to look, when it comes to separating genuine signed Callas material from rogue examples.
- Petsalis (also) points out that Callas and her mother had something of a not insubstantial 'professional' disagreement with Maria Trivella, at some stage in Greece.
- That, in and of itself, lends some credence to my personal suspicion that the dedication and 'signature' on the Trivella card could well be a vanity inscription; something that might well be worth testing at another time.
- It is only important here, though, as regards the visual similarities as between the Foresti letter and the Oath of Allegiance signature, because they 'look' to be by the same hand to me.

In summary then, my analysis/research tells me that Maria Callas must have been Nina Foresti/Anita Duval. I honestly cannot reach any other conclusion!

My hope is that all readers think that my approach – decidedly different to the various treatments that have gone 'before' (Issues 27, 28 and 33 – has been a worthwhile 'journey' and that it has produced a credible result:

- Irrespective of what 'others' have opined, I believe Ardoin's initial research provided me with an excellent (and subsequently proved) valid starting point.
- Initially, I thought he must have been to Washington to inspect the Major Bowes archives.
- Then of course, I was literally shunted back on my heels, by the very serious claim that he was in fact a blatant forger and that the whole thing was his own lying invention.
- I always felt that I myself would have to get down to Washington and personally verify what he had written on the subject...
- ...because my own interpretation of the Foresti event was that I was being asked to accept the possibility/probability that

Ardoin himself had probably secreted the page he had published in his 1982 edition of *The Callas Legacy* into the Library of Congress holdings of the Major Bowes collection!

- It was a monstrous claim, one that I knew I had to test myself and something sadly that has taken me twelve years to resolve.
- In the interim, a chance email exchange between my internet friend Berruti produced some phenomenal new hard evidence as to the provenance of the page Ardoin had published.
- And... Pablo very kindly gave me the photographic evidence that you have all now seen for yourselves.
- It took me most of the way towards dispelling this story that Ardoin was an out and out forger...
- ...but since I was planning a trip to the Eastern United States in April this year, there was no reason not to go down to Washington and examine the archives for myself.
- I had already formed in my mind the way the essay should go... beyond re-examining my first perhaps over-the-top essay on the subject... and that that criticism of it was very fair.
- This, I could not allow to happen when I revisited the topic for the second time, in writing.
- The path, in my mind was logical: 'Pin readers down to accepting that Maria Callas sang on the Major Bowes Amateur Hour show or (that) she did not'.
- Those readers who though I was merely just up to no good, were invited to walk away at that point... and come back to our Magazine with a well-argued essay on why she had not.
- Those willing to stay with me on the journey (because they could see no holes in my logic 'thus-far', then had to ask themselves two questions: "What did she sing and where were her written application materials?"
- Ardoin's treatment in his very first *Callas Legacy*, I have subsequently proved to be absolutely truthful, for I myself went through all the physical records that he himself did.
- Further-more, he was totally right in his statement about the written material, which I myself discovered was genuine vintage material with the Form B. being in keeping with others in said files:

- How hilarious though, to find another Callas in the files and who is to say that this application was not from the relatively famous actor/stand-up comedian Charlie Callas?! He would have been fifteen at the time.



Charlie (Charles) Callas *1924 - †2011

- Additionally, my genuine field of expertise is Callas' handwriting and here, as you have read, I have found even more examples of comparisons (more than those that did not satisfy my interlocutor in my 2007 essay)...
- ...indeed more than sufficient examples to satisfy me beyond reasonable doubt that the three pages I discovered in the Washington archives were indeed penned by the hand of eleven year old Callas.
- Certainly, I did (also) read somewhere an opinion that it was the applicant herself who wrote the original letter and official application form.
- In this regard, I had my own example

of the mother's handwriting and Karl himself provided me with a sample from the sister in English. Both ladies exhibit a style of physically separating single words into two or more parts. Callas never did this.

- Of course, the address was apparently spurious, though Nadia Stancioff states that this is where the family was living at the time.
- She however does not provide the proof that is needed, so it remains for any of the naysayers to go through the New York electoral roles of the time to see whether these official records do or do not disclose any exact link.
- My strong suspicion however is that no Foresti family name will turn up either; thus putting to the flame some of the ridiculous assertions published about 'Nina's subsequent life' – very difficult when the person never existed in the first place. (That, though, I have not tested.)
- On the other hand, readers can for the very first time, see for themselves the purple-blue 'REPLIED' stamp on the letter, so one way or another, this 'reply' got the applicant down to the Bowes offices to fill out the application form.
- So that only leaves the many criticisms that Nina Foresti's audition tape sounded nothing like the sound of the great Callas that we all know and love.
- We must now though, reacquaint ourselves with Ardoin's own evidence when he wrote that he "listened to all female contestants between 1935 and 1937 performing anything that could be considered remotely serious. The possibility was a soprano named Nina Foresti."
- Ardoin found reason to suspect the name, though he did not come to this conclusion:
- That A nit a Du Val has the same 'sing' to it as Ma Ri a Call as and that Nin a For es ti comes pretty close to... save in reverse.
- I did not/could not do this. By way of compensation however, I went through every possible relevant last name alphabetical letter box with a fine-tooth comb and reached the same conclusion that Ardoin did (obviously by this 'alternate' route) and concluded that the only possible matching application letter/form B. was the one written by Nina Foresti.
- So finally, we must address the fact that Nina Foresti sang the Butterfly aria.

TEXT OF THE INTERVIEW

Edward (Major) Bowes: Nina Foresti, Nina Foresti.

Maria Callas (Nina Foresti): Yes Major.

E.B.: What's your ambition? Operatic? Concert? Radio?

M.C.: Well, my ambitions were very high, but since my father's laboratory have closed, I've taken a position.

E.B.: Your father was a chemist. So what are you doing now?

M.C.: Well, I'm employed in the toy department of a large department store.

E.B.: You are Italian-American?

M.C.: Yes Major, I was born here in New York.

E.B.: And you want to sing something from Puccini?

M.C.: Yes, I would like to.

E.B.: Yes, I thought so, they all do. Alright, what're you going to sing?

M.C.: Something from *Madama Butterfly*.

E.B.: Alright.

M.C.: But abbreviated.

E.B.: That's good – go ahead.



Edward (Major) Bowes *1874 - †1946

- I'm absolutely on-side with everyone who has written/opined that this voice sounds nothing like that of Maria Callas and that the performance lacks the musicality that was Callas' unique 'fingerprint'.
- With all that said, one is left with what one is left with, for there is nowhere else to go. In other words: It is what it is... get over it.
- If only Jackie Callas had been asked

what Maria sang on the Major Bowes show. Given of course that Jackie never once mentioned her sister's appearance on this programme, one is left wondering exactly how much knowledge she genuinely had, about her sister's 'public' appearances at the time. This question (of what she actually sang) was sadly, never put to Maria herself, save what Stancioff had to say on the matter.

- Both women have imperfect memories of the Major Bowes show, but that does not mean that they are attempting to cover up the truth, save as it suited Maria, once to do.
- Recently, Tom Volf contacted Stancioff, with as result:

2. I spoke with Nadia this morning she said that when they were on holidays in Tragonisi in 71 Maria told her that she did sing on that recording (so called Nina Foresti), that's what Nadia remembers. She knows about the letter to Olive and understands there is a contradiction here but she said she can only speak of conversations she remembers. This is not only what I expected, but what I wanted to hear and read. Callas treated Olive just like she treated Jose – i.e. she told them (in Olive's case, via that letter and in Jose's case, via all those platitudes in the multiple boring telephone conversations) just what she wanted them to know...fibs included. I had always believed Nadia, notwithstanding what that know-all friend of John Ardoin claimed he *knew*. We can therefore, finally put that Nina Foresti business to bed...and it would not be a bad idea to make that point in the film.

I wrote earlier, that whilst in New York, I did not attempt to contact Steven Linakis, because he would have been 97 now and could not, in my opinion, really add anything meaningful to the debate.

No one (either) pointed out to Jackie Callas that one of Rosa Ponselle's most famous records was her 1919 recording of 'Un bel di', when she was 22 years old. That, now, can be heard all over YouTube, so who is to say that this did not have had some influence on the young Callas. Her sister of course, made it very clear that Ponselle was Callas' idol and that she listened to all of the soprano's recordings that she and her mother could get their hands on.

It seems reasonable to me and it is strange that no one else seems ever to have considered this important point. On the other hand, it may well be worth revisiting the question of having an audio engineer take a look at the Foresti singing, but only if the technology has improved to any realistic degree from what Karl wrote in June 1999:

"I discussed a possible voice spectrography with specialists of the Catholic

University of Nijmegen. I was told that the technique of voice recognition of, especially, singing voices is not yet far advanced to conclude to a scientifically justified standpoint."

In conclusion then, my opinion, based on all the academic style research work that I have been able to do, is that we can close the Nina Foresti Case once and for all. Indeed, there remain other Callas mysteries out there in the 'firmament' (two of which were mentioned by me in the body of this essay) that curious *Maria Callas International Club* members can and perhaps should devote some serious attention, under all the circumstances.

It has been an absolute pleasure for

me to be able to take a second look at this case; it has been worthwhile and I hope all members feel that my tale was a good and valid journey of both intrigue and ultimately... discovery.

David Crothers
Sydney, Australia
July 2019



ADDENDUM I

On page 13 I wrote:

"In any event, my interlocutor concluded his remarks by attacking the sound that actually came out of Nina Foresti's mouth, in that it had virtually no class and that it bore zero resemblance to the voice of the adult Maria Callas that we know and love. And how could such a classy musician sound so dreadful, way back then... especially as he was able to quote one particular child prodigy pianist who was as amazing then, as she subsequently became to the world later on."

Of course, in the balance of my essay, I went on to my major discoveries, during my Washington DC visit. All my 'further' efforts, though, did not necessarily address the exact criticisms raised 'above'.

On 28 August 2019 however, Youtube published this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQ8v9I5Ss90>

- This film feature Emanne Beasha, born 18 September 2008, who, the day before, on 27 August 2019, sang 'Ebben? Ne Andro Lontana' ('Well then? I'll Go Far away') from Catalani's *La Wally* for her appearance in the Quarter Finals of the fourteenth edition of *America's Got Talent*.

- This then ten year old American/Jordanian singer is of Circassian descent.



She was born in Amman and started to sing opera from the age of six in Italian. Her parents discovered her talent as a two-year-old in Jordan and before coming to live in America, she was the winner of the fifth season of the programme *Arabs Got Talent*.

- Now... whilst one can clearly hear many obvious juvenile (unfinished/not fully formed or musically developed) char-

acteristics in her vocal production... it is also glaringly obvious that there are multiple vocal features or qualities that appear to belong typically to a much older person... someone with far more adult like physical features.

- My 'critic' above wonders out loud how such a classy musician (Callas) could sound so dreadful, way back when...
- Unfortunately, this individual's bias is showing all too clearly... because he does not care for the sound nor did it suit his narrative. The truth though, is that the Nina Foresti Butterfly performance is by no means dreadful and

there is no way that 'it' could not be the basis for what Callas was to become.

- Young Ms Beasha's performance pokes an enormous hole in the argument that the 'Un bel di' audition cannot possibly have come from an eleven year old child.
- And to that comment about the lack of musicality in the *Butterfly* aria, I can add that this young Jordanian girl sang two other pieces during her further progression (she did not get through to the final, this year) which do not sound as accomplished as does the *Wally* aria.
- No one knows what Ms Beasha will go

on to become, in terms of being a top quality classical soprano.

- Her 2019 effort, however, goes a very long way towards demonstrating that there is no way that Callas could not have sung that Puccini aria on *The Major Bowes Amateur Hour*. There is nothing there that disqualifies a well-trained ten or eleven year old girl from having been perfectly physically capable of producing an adult (albeit an unfinished) soprano sound, in that 1935 Major Bowes *Butterfly* aria performance.

David Crothers
October 2019

ADDENDUM II

The very interesting and revealing essay, with the October Addendum, by David invites me to write a further addendum, dealing with Nina Foresti/Maria Callas' singing voice.

Based on David's essay one can now be 100% sure that Maria Callas was indeed Nina Foresti/Anita Duval and that John Ardoin was an honest person who didn't invent in any way the Nina Foresti story. There is no reason to assume that Major Bowes' assistant did something wrong in transferring the programmes from the original acetates to the tapes which he subsequently provided to Ardoin.

Ardoin listened to all the tapes of appropriate female contestants of the Major Bowes programmes and "revealed a singing voice weak and quite unlike anything known to be by Callas," and he

wrote that Nina Foresti's singing voice was not Callas', in contrast to her speaking voice.

Whether the singing voice was really Callas' is also expressed in the doubts that the Nina Foresti articles in Magazines 27, 28 and 33 contain and these doubts do not diminish when reading David's essay, although his Addendum takes a little bit away from the doubts.

What is for sure is that the wording of the interview and the singing itself are linked together by the aria 'Un bel di' from *Madama Butterfly*; the speaking voice talks about singing this aria and the singing voice produced it.

Another way to approach the matter is to turn the question around and start from the 'fact' that the singing voice is not from Nina Foresti/Maria Callas. In that case someone – other than John Ardoin and Major Bowes' assistant – must have put a great lot of effort in having a 'girl' sing the 'Un bel di' aria and (have) replaced the original acetate in the Major Bowes archives with a fake one. This should

then have been done before the Major Bowes files were stored at The Performing Arts Library in Washington. The big question then to answer is: who did this, when and why? There is not the slightest indication in David's essay that answers this question. Until somebody comes to me with a reasonable or factual answer I'm not to distract from my (present) view that the singing voice on the known recording of Nina Foresti's audition at the Major Bowes Amateur Hour programme is that of Callas at the time.

Karl van Zoggel

New York, Inwood Park, 1934

