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EILEEN FARRELL: THE COMPLETE COLUMBIA ALBUM COLLECTION
A Centenary Tribute to a Great American Singer
with 6 LPs appearing for the first time on CD



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“If the fate of nations were to depend on a voice-contest, America would probably choose [Eileen Farrell](#) as its champion, and our national security would be guaranteed,” wrote a leading US critic in *Gramophone* in 1958. “For ‘America’s great dramatic soprano’ has not only a voice of prodigious range but of a warmth which reflects its owner’s personality.” To mark the 100th anniversary of her birth (Farrell died in 2002), Sony Classical is proud to present a new 16-CD collection of this beloved artist’s entire American Columbia discography, displaying her uniquely wide repertoire, ranging from Brünnhilde to Broadway, from Cherubini’s *Medea* to Berg’s *Marie*, from Debussy songs to “Danny Boy”, from Gluck to Gershwin.

Born in 1920 in Connecticut to vaudeville performers who styled themselves “The Singing O’Farrells”, she studied with a Met contralto and by the age of 20 had moved to New York with her own CBS radio program, “Eileen Farrell Sings”. It lasted seven years and made her famous (Frank Sinatra was one of her guests), singing a mix of arias, light classical works, Irish ballads and Broadway standards. That diversity is generously represented in Sony’s new edition. The earliest recordings date from 1946, during Farrell’s

years as a broadcasting star: an enchantingly delivered group of favorite songs proudly celebrating the singer's Irish heritage. Like many of the other discs in this set, it is appearing for the first time on CD.

Among the multitude of listeners entranced by Farrell's radio show was Leopold Stokowski, with whom she made her New York Philharmonic debut in 1949. The orchestra's then music director, Dimitri Mitropoulos, soon became her mentor, and in 1951 she sang Marie in his epoch-making Carnegie Hall concert performance of Berg's *Wozzeck*. Columbia recorded and released it; *High Fidelity* reviewed it, exclaiming: "The recording is superb, and so is the performance ... done with complete conviction." Eventually Farrell appeared with the New York orchestra no fewer than 61 times.

Her official debut on the opera stage had to wait another five years: as Leonora in *Il trovatore* opposite Jussi Björling in San Francisco. In 1958, she essayed Cherubini's *Medea* – one of her favorite roles – in the same house and recorded extended excerpts of it for Columbia in New York. *High Fidelity* compared Farrell's interpretation favorably to Callas's, praising her "voice of almost flawless beauty, and she is a musician of great intelligence." *Gramophone* concurred: "The disc should be heard by all lovers of fine singing." Farrell's Met debut – as Gluck's *Alceste*, also sampled here – came in 1960.

The other operatic discs in this Farrell collection feature the great soprano in Verdi and Puccini aria recitals. And, most impressively of all, there is her classic 1961-Grammy-winning Wagner collaboration with the New York Philharmonic and Leonard Bernstein, who – wrote *Opera News* in the singer's obituary – "delighted this staunch Irish Catholic girl with his naughty, high-energy, smart-funny Jewish boy persona. And because she could relax around him, she listened to him: he got her to think more deeply about Wagner's themes and motives than anyone had done previously. Even in her youngest days, she had been capable of a certain majesty, but her performances with Bernstein demonstrated a new warmth and spontaneity."

Their recording of "Brünnhilde's Immolation" from *Götterdämmerung* and the *Wesendonck Lieder*, never out of the catalogue, has been showered with countless encomiums. When it was first released, *High Fidelity's* opera specialist called the *Ring* closing scene "certainly the best since Flagstad's prewar recording ... The *Wesendonck Lieder* are vocally very close to perfect, and just right in terms of mood. 'Der Engel' and 'Träume', in particular, are to my ears simply gorgeous ... The orchestra sounds wonderful (aided in no small degree by some magnificent engineering) ... Conductor and orchestra provide a lovely, billowy cushion for the songs, thus adding to the effect of one of the finest sides among stereo vocal releases."

Farrell in oratorio is represented by her contribution to Bernstein's 1960 New York recording of Beethoven's *Missa solennis*, here included complete: "What particularly strikes one is the wonderful feeling of spontaneity and energy that radiates from this interpretation" (*High Fidelity*), as well as Ormandy's 1959 Philadelphia *Messiah*. Probably the most famous of her many celebrated albums of pop songs is "I've Got a Right to Sing the Blues" from 1959. *High Fidelity's* enthusiastic reviewer, seemingly still unaware of Farrell's deep roots in this repertoire, wrote that she "makes the jump from Wagner and Cherubini to Arlen and Rodgers with ease and complete conviction. In this remarkable vocal tour de force the singer displays a knowing command of a medium most people would imagine to be beyond her ken, singing with uninhibited freedom and a sure sense of style that almost border on jazz." In 1975, *Gramophone* deemed the album "a treasured collector's item", and the same phrase is likely to be applied to Sony Classical new box of Eileen Farrell's complete Columbia recordings.