

TOSTI, CARUSO, DELIUS

and The Grand in Folkestone

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In the dawn of 21st century as Folkestone tries to coin a new image for itself through various bold creative projects, its silent and somehow reserved history, can also be the source of inspiration for the more romantic artist, who feels a strong and passionate longing for the grace and beauty of a past and forgotten age. An original historic setting and a crackling old gramophone can sometimes produce that magical stimulant. As a composer and music historian based in Folkestone, I came across some interesting historic musical connections to one of our town's landmark buildings: The Grand. It appears that Sir Francesco ("Ciccio") Paolo Tosti (1846-1916), famous composer and professor at the Royal Academy of Music, as well as singing master to the Royal Family, stayed there for long spells, not so long after the building was inaugurated. There is a letter in his own hand, written from The Grand, dated 8 February 1908, to the great tenor friend of his, Enrico Caruso (1873-1921), thanking him for the beautiful recording he made of his song *Ideale*.

"Dearest friend, I spent a good half hour, today, in listening to you sing, three times, *Ideale*. It is the first time that I have loved the gramophone. Affections, yours, Ciccio". Bruno Zirato, *Enrico Caruso: A biography*, 1922, (p. 242)

We will never know in which of the suites Tosti listened to Caruso's recording, but thanks to modern technology you can listen to the same record on youtube (also available on *itunes*) by typing:

<http://www.youtube.com>

A century on the experience is quite moving!

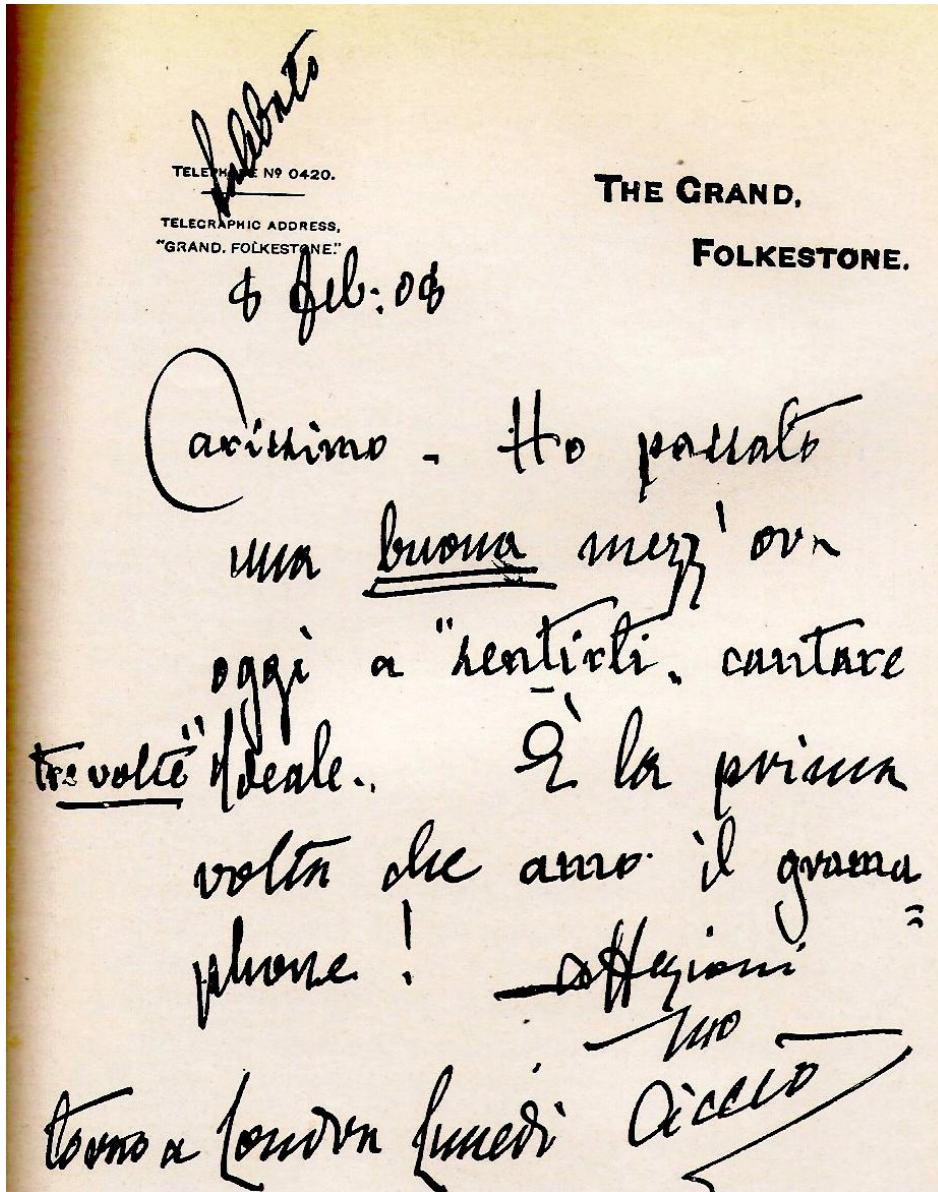
Frederick Delius (1862-1934) also, it seems, stayed at The Grand on the evening of 8 August 1929 on his way from France to the first Delius Festival held in London, which was organised by Sir Thomas Beecham (1879-1961). Delius, extremely frail and ill at the time, was reluctant to take the journey at first, until Beecham convinced him by arranging an ambulance to bring him over from his home in the French village of Grez-sur-Loing, near Fontainebleau. This is how Clare Delius in *Memories of my Brother* (London, 1935) describes Fred and his wife Jelka's arrival at Folkestone:

"When they arrived at Folkestone they waited until all the passengers had gone ashore before they attempted to move him. He was then carried in his invalid chair, propped up with cushions, down the gangway to a waiting ambulance. All that the press-men, who had come down to witness his return, could see was a figure with silvered hair, wearing a grey felt hat, a heavy overcoat, with his sightless

eyes shielded by tortoiseshell glasses and a pale, wrinkled ascetic face. [...] From the quay side he was taken to the Grand Hotel at Folkestone, and the following day, August 9th, the same ambulance transported him to the Langham Hotel, London". (pp. 219-220)

The festival was a great success and it was the last time when Delius heard his large scale works in the concert hall. More luminaries will no doubt continue to surface from The Grand's chequered history.

Tosti's letter to Caruso written from The Grand on 8 February 1908 published in



Enrico Caruso: A biography by Bruno Zirato, 1922 (p. 242)



Jelka Rosen and Frederick Delius in 1929