

'LA FAVORITA' AT THE MET. 20 and 23 March 1978

Leonora, Shirley Verrett (20th)/Nedda Casei (23rd);
Fernando, John Alexander; Alfonso, Sherrill Milnes;
Baldassare, Bonaldo Giaiotti; Inez, Alma Jean
Smith; Gasparo, John Carpenter. Conductor, Jesus
Lopez-Cobos; producer, Patrick Tavernia;
designers, Ming Cho Lee and Jane Greenwood.

The New York Metropolitan, despite some recent
developments, still has the reputation of being a
'singers' house', and with the right singers in
best form performances can be very exciting. The
end of March offered the chance of seeing a number
of operas, two of which are comparative rarities in
England - Donizetti's La Favorita and Cilea's
Adriana Lecouvreur. Interestingly Jesus Lopez-
Cobos was in charge of both and proved to be a
conductor particularly responsive to the singers'
abilities, mood and vocal health. Adriana
Lecouvreur may be a slight piece musically but,
given voices like those of Carreras, Quilico and
Cossotto and the remarkable powers of Scotto as
singer and actress, Mr. Lopez-Cobos was able to
shape a fine performance of momentum and impact, with
immense theatricality, well deserving its tumultuous
reception, 'ticker tape' shower and all.

What a disappointment then for Donizettians that La
Favorita, a work of considerable musical worth,
noble melodies and cogent ensembles, seemed tepid
in comparison. The conductor - assuming the
decisions were his - opted for the standard Italian
text, with most of the standard cuts; the weakness
of this version in comparison with the complete
score to the French text has been often pointed out.
In these performances at least some of the ballet
music was heard but other cuts made structural
nonsense of Donizetti's carefully balanced finales.
First-rate singing might have saved the day but this
was not always in evidence, and Mr. Lopez-Cobos
appeared to be prepared to match his style to what
his cast offered and showed little fire and conviction
of his own. Shirley Verrett's performance was
generally fine and certainly enjoyable but she had

claimed the audience's indulgence and was clearly
treading carefully; by 23rd March she had with-
drawn and her replacement was just adequate.
John Alexander singing Fernando for the first
time at the Met (Pavarotti had done earlier
performances) was unable to do more than sing
most of the notes, while Bonaldo Giaiotti simply
displayed some fine sonorous tone as Baldassare.
It was Sherrill Milnes as Alfonso who commanded
the greatest admiration, singing superbly and
acting with greater commitment than one had
thought possible from his London appearance.
He almost became the star - but how can La
Favorita be a baritone's opera?

In sum, not the ideal La Favorita, but one was
grateful for the best in it, including, despite
lamentable choreography, what was heard of the
ballet music; it was certainly good to renew
acquaintance with the opera, not seen on a London
stage for nearly 20 years.

Don Gulliver and John Standen



Mlle. Favanti

Mme. Rossi-Caccia