

'ANNA BOLENA'

Tragedia in due atti di Felice Romani

Musica di Gaetano Donizetti

Cast: Francoise Garner, Dimiter Petkov, Cristina Anghelakova, Antonio Bevacqua, Gabriella Carturan, Frederic Vassar, Piero Di Palma.

Conductor: Paul Ethuin. Orchestra and chorus of the Theatre des Arts.

Production: Giampaolo Zennaro. Decor: Roger Gaujoin. Costumes: Jean-Philippe Holtay and Lucian Robert.

Rouen, Theatre des Arts: 21st January 1979 (2nd performance)

'Anna Bolena' has celebrated its 148th birthday in Rouen, if almost a month late. Unfortunately, the opera, in the edition presented at the Theatre des Arts, had a great many cuts but the complete performance (which you can hear thanks to the recordings by EMI and Decca) lasts more than three hours and requires just about inexhaustible stamina which is hard to find in this area of the repertory (perhaps in some future world it can be handed over to robot-singers who can do anything!)

The choice of 'Anna Bolena' is not such a rash one for a Theatre of the provinces - although not a 'provincial' one - like that of Rouen, if, that is, the results come together both on a musical and vocal plane. Paul Ethuin, whose conducting is both sound and varied, has at his disposal a naturally flexible orchestra, together they rose very positively to the interpretive challenges of this most difficult Donizettian score.

Francoise Garner (Anna) moves on the stage in a perfectly summary and conventional manner (she is not the only one) but makes good use of her excellent vocal equipment which is particularly suited to the early Ottocento (in 1976 and 1977 she sang in Donizetti's 'Duca d'Alba' at Ghent). A convincing dramatic characterisation did not always come over: on the other hand this was balanced by her gentle, wide-ranging and solid vocalism. She responded to the contrasted opportunities in the score, her Anna was both moving and dignified, especially in the finale. In direct contrast was the vibrant and vehement 'seconda donna': Cristina Anghelakova (Giovanna Seymour), psychologically a bit sketchy but vocally valid. As for the others, effective and impassioned in the arduous role of Percy was tenor Antonio Bevacqua; as an imposing Henry VIII, Dimiter Petkov was alternately haughty and insinuating, threatening and cunning and in possession of a powerful emission with a fascinating timbre. Gabriella Carturan, the page Smeton already in 1957 at La Scala, after 22 years still conserved - apart from her voice with its heavier quality, the physique of a page. Confined to the minor role of Lord Rochefort, the brother of the queen, the young bass Frederic Vassar rose to the part equally well and with honour. A final mention deservedly to Piero Di Palma (Hervey).

The chorus of the Theatre des Arts was both splendid and enthusiastic, thoroughly involved (they sang in an irreproachable Italian).

Grey and black obsessively dominated both the scenery and the costumes, the latter quite functional and mediocre except in the descriptively long finale of the opera. It is appropriate that the production by Zennaro, indifferent elsewhere, here emerged incisively and at its full value: the final scene was closed by an immense grating behind which the ladies of honour, dressed in mourning, not able to come forward and give vent to their distress, restrained, heartbroken and impotent spectators of the last hours of their queen, ('Chi puo' vederla a ciglio asciutto'), shrank at the spectacle of Anna, alone on the rack of the grating delirious between her happy and sad hours while waiting to mount the scaffold.

FULVIO LO PRESTI

Trans. Alexander Weatherson

Donizetti Recorded Editions



DONIZETTI DA CAMERA DS 001

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directed by Edna Graham

