

Recordings

Vincenzo Bellini *I puritani* opera in tre atti di Carlo Pepoli. Nuova Era
6842-44 (3 CD's)

This recording was made in Catania in September 1989 in the Teatro Massimo Bellini from live performances forming part of that year's Bellini Festival. It uses the Orchestra and chorus of that theatre, conducted by Richard Bonynge. The accompanying booklet shows one tantalising photograph of the visually beautiful realisation achieved on that occasion, and it is well to reflect that, though *I puritani* treats of a dark hour of English history, the historicity of its argument is encountered only en passant.

as it were - most appropriate for a work written for Paris!

The conductor too gives us a most impressive proof of his *sensibilité* as an advocate of the Romantic repertoire. In this case he maintains at all times great respect for the singing voice and the words that these voices articulate, not least in the painting of those gentle orchestral water colours below, forming the deceptive basis for often cruelly taxing vocal lines above, and in the flow, the cohesion, and the logic that he brings to the concerted pieces.

The chorus, instructed by Dante Ghersi, obviously benefitted greatly, to take one example, the Act II opening with Giorgio ('Ah, dottor! Ah, terror! Ah, pietà!') is a superb collective display of *clear soft singing* which is the very essence of true vocal art. Unfortunately the Giorgio they accompany (Paolo Washington) is not in the same class for he gives a rather monochromatic performance not in the style of this composer.

This caveat apart, the rest of the cast shows very considerable strength and depth. The Bruno is an excellent vignette but not named (alas!) in the booklet. The Riccardo of Christopher Robertson gives a most impressive display - voice well-produced and controlled so that he interprets instead of just sings. Arturo (William Matteuzzi) was written as we know to measure for Giovan Battista Rubini: Matteuzzi is very much at home in this part for he has a lyric tenor voice used with both style and discretion (in general!). I say "*in general*" for there are one or two infelicities - attempts at the *passaggio* that are pushed, and signs of vocal fatigue near the end. Elvira (Mariella Devia) has the most exigent remit to discharge, not only must she put on a *suit* made to the measure of Giulia Grisi in the Paris première, but also to be measured against Maria Callas in her 1850 recording under Tullio Serafin. It is a remit more than competently discharged, more truly, discharged to perfection, for La Devia has a voice of superbly balanced construction with a glorious palette of tonal colours, superlatively intelligently deployed. Not a Big Voice to rattle the chandeliers, the joy of this instrument lies in the style in which it is produced and in the beauty of the results. Take her *Mad Scene* for proof, how superlatively she paints the chiaroscuro as her mind unhinges (to say nothing of her virtuosity).

The recording comes with a booklet containing a lengthy essay from the authoritative Friedrich Lipmann, libretto and English translation, but it should be noted that this libretto is not complete vis-à-vis that used for this performance.

Some esteemed English critics have purported to find this recording inferior to the Callas/Serafin set. Pardon these gentlemen, they are wrong. The Serafin set was a pioneer recording at a time when this repertoire was only re-emerging. This recording comes with the benefit of extensive and rigorous research in the intervening years. In the *humble but correct* view of this writer, this recording is excellent and he has no hesitation in recommending an investment in these discs. (And he would mention that the Nuova Era Opera Catalogue is an essential reference document for any serious enthusiast of this repertory).

Philip G. Gormley



Reinaldo Macias



Alberto Zedda



Hyejin Kim



Joo Hyun Chang

The international line-up for *Adelaide di Borgogna* at Liège