

VERDI: UN BALLO IN MASCHERA

JAN PIERCE (RICCARDO), HERVA NELLI (AMELIA),
ROBERT MERRILL (RENATO), CLARAME TURNER (LIRICA),
VIRGINIA HASKINS (OSCAR), GEORGE CEHANOVSKY (SILVANO),
NICOLA MOSCONA (SAMUEL), NORMAN SCOTT (TOM),
JOHN CARMEN ROSSI (JUDGE, SERVANT OF AMELIA)

NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
ROBERT SHAW CHORALE

CONDUCTED BY ARTURO TOSCANINI

CD One

- 01 Act I - Prelude (4:14)
- 02 Posa in pace (1:47)
- 03 Amici miei...soldati - La rivedrà nell'estasi (3:20)
- 04 Il cenno mio de là (2:13)
- 05 Alla vita che l'antide (2:21)
- 06 Il primo giudice (1:28)
- 07 Cavatina: Volta la terra... (1:40)
- 08 Signori oggi d'Ulrica...Orni cura (2:55)
- 09 Zitti, l'incanto non dessi turbare (3:45)
- 10 Arrivo il primo... Villano, dà indietro (2:26)
- 11 Su fatemi largo (3:20)
- 12 Che v'agita così (4:51)
- 13 Su profetessa monta il treppie (3:38)
- 14 Chi voi siate l'audace parola (5:43)
- 15 Finale - Finisci il vaticinio (4:14)

Act II - Prelude - Ecco l'orrido campo (8:41)

Teco io sto... Gran Dio... (8:05)

CD Two

- 01 Ahimè!...s'appressa alcuni... (4:44)
- 02 Seguitemi!...Mio Dio! (7:07)
- 03 Act III - A tal colpo è nulla il pianto (5:53)
- 04 Alzati! Là tuo figlio a te conrede riveder... (5:53)
- 05 Stam soli...udite... (8:11)
- 06 Alle danze questa sera (4:01)
- 07 Forse la soglia atinse... (4:58)
- 08 Ah! Dessa e là (Festa de Ballo e Coro) (5:24)
- 09 Fervono amori e danze... (1:46)
- 10 Ah! Perché qui!... fuggite... (5:02)
- 11 Finale - Ella e pura, in braccio a morte... (4:15)

Recorded live at Carnegie Hall, 17th January, 1954 (Act I) and 24th January, 1954 (Acts II and III)

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Cover artwork based on a photograph of Arturo Toscanini conducted at Carnegie Hall

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TOSCANINI

CONDUCTS VERDI'S

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RECORDED IN CARNEGIE HALL JANUARY 1954



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COMPACT
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VERDI: UN BALLO IN MASCHERA
TOSCANINI, NBC SO, ROBERT SHAW CHORAL AND SOLOISTS

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Un ballo in maschera (A Masked Ball), is an opera in three acts by Giuseppe Verdi with text by Antonio Somma. The opera's first production was at the Teatro Apollo, Rome, February 17, 1859.

The opera is based on the assassination of King Gustav III of Sweden, but is not historically accurate. During its composition, Verdi was asked by government censors to make many changes to the opera due to its politically sensitive subject matter. Among these changes is a transportation of the setting to Boston, Massachusetts.

Despite its tragic conclusion, *Un ballo in maschera* has many moments of the brilliance and irony associated with comedy — a mixture which has led critics to label it "Shakespearean."

In 1792, the King of Sweden, Gustav III, was killed, the result of a political conspiracy against him. He was shot while attending a masked ball and died 13 days later from his wounds. It is on this episode that Verdi's Masked Ball is loosely based; however, very little historical truth is contained in Verdi's opera.

In 1833, the French playwright Eugène Scribe wrote about Gustav in a play called Gustave III. He retained the names of some of the historical figures involved, the conspiracy, and the killing at the masked ball. The rest of the play — the characterizations, the romance, the fortune-telling, etc. — is Scribe's invention; and it is Scribe's play that is the source of the story in Verdi's opera.

Scribe's play was well known and had been used by other composers, including Auber, as the basis for operas. However, the censors were still wary of it, since it showed the assassination of a king in a recent period of European history. During composition, the censors in Naples, where Verdi's opera was to be performed, required extensive changes, eventually demanding more alterations than the composer was willing to make. Therefore, he broke his contract and was sued by the management of the Teatro San Carlo, thus provoking him to lodge a counter-claim against the theater for damages. Eventually, the legal fight ended with the house's charges being withdrawn, freeing Verdi to offer the opera to the Rome Opera house.

But the Roman censors also wanted to make changes. Finally it was agreed that the setting would be moved from Europe, and the rank of the leading character would be reduced from king to colonial governor. So it was that the setting of the opera is Boston during the British colonial period, and the leading character is Riccardo, the Count (or Earl) of Warwick.

This opera was first seen in New York its US premiere on 11 February 1861 and in the UK on 15 June of that year. In the 20th century, especially after a 1935 production in Copenhagen, many modern stagings have restored the original Swedish setting and characters' names. On January 7, 1955, Marian Anderson, singing the role of Ulrica, broke the "color barrier" at the Metropolitan Opera, becoming the first African-American artist ever to appear with that company. Today, the opera is performed regularly.

The present recording, which was made over two weeks and broadcast live, was Toscanini's final operatic work - he went on to give four further orchestral performances with the NBC Symphony Orchestra. Jan Peerce was a late replacement for Jussi Björling who had to withdraw ten days before the first concert. The performance remains one of the definitive recorded documents of this work, and a rare opportunity to hear in hi-fi quality a conductor who had had a working relationship with the composer - beginning some 67 years earlier with the premiere of Verdi's *Otello*.

NOTES FROM WIKIPEDIA AND BY ANDREW ROSE - FURTHER NOTES ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM