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Maria Callas La Traviata

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People frequently ask "Which is the best Traviata?" and the answer is very difficult to supply. There is still something to be said for the Toscanini version; although the singers were not at all what one would like, the dramatic vigour of the score was wonderfully realised. But *Traviata* is not really a conductor's opera. More than any other work, even *Carmen*, it stands or falls by the prima donna. One can put up with quite a secondary tenor and baritone... Callas seems to me the superior artist, without any question. For one thing she has the extraordinary gift of vocal suggestion, to colour her voice to imply all the irony of the part; where Violetta must pretend (so often the point) to be cheerful, pretend to be recovered when the wing of death has already stroked her, Mme Callas brings to it what Gerhardt brought to Brahms or Feuilleure to Dumas. If all this is not part of *Traviata* as well as sumptuous sounds, then the opera is surely only a compendium of scrumptious tunes... As for some of her phrasing, I can only hark back to my threadbare comparison with a master violinist; the reprise of "*Dite alia giovine*" in the duet with Germont *pare* or the apprehensive rise of the tune "*Che fia? Morir mi sento*", where she positively seems to wince at the dreadful situation. Very lovely, too, is her dominating of the ensemble with the big swinging line of "*Alfredo, Alfredo, di questo cor non puoi comprendere...*" which concludes the unhappy evening party chez Flora; and, as here, Mme Tebaldi is also very beautiful, comparison again looms, for the latter soprano is technically surer. But is she so meaningful? Callas, as Mr. Shawe-Taylor I think said, "sounds as if she had written the libretto herself". It is "only a waltz tune" to be sure; yet what feeling it carries...

P. H-W., *The Gramophone*, January 1958 - *excerpts*

Transfer notes

Before signing a contract with Walter Legge at EMI, Maria Callas had already committed herself to recording four operas for Cetra in Italy. Of these, only *La Gioconda* in 1952 and *La Traviata* in 1953 materialised; it remains unclear as to why the contract was not completed. Even though the Italian recording remained available on import only outside Italy for a number of years, it meant that Legge never commissioned an EMI studio recording of Callas in what was one of her most famous roles. And I'm afraid Cetra's recording facilities weren't up to those of EMI at the time. Thus this classic recording of Callas (albeit with a somewhat second-rate supporting cast) has long suffered from a rather inadequate sound quality which has a rather boxy, enclosed quality to it, with an unsympathetic acoustic and a tendency to peak distortion on the voices. The combination of re-equalisation, distortion reduction, subtle de-noising and the acoustic space of one of the world's finest opera houses that has made up this new 32-bit XR remastering goes a huge way to alleviate these issues, bringing significant sonic improvements that breathe new life and colour into Maria Callas's wonderful performance. **A.R.**

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
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Verdi La Traviata

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Maria Callas

Francesco Albanese
Ugo Savarese
Ede Maietti Gandolfo
Ines Marietti
Mariano Caruso
Alberto Albertini
Mario Zorogniotti
Tommaso Soley

Cetra Chorus, Orchestra
Sinfonico di Torino della RAI
Conductor Gabriele Santini

Studio recording, 1953

Verdi La Traviata

CD One

- 1 Prelude (4:37)
- 2 Act 1 - Dell'invito trascorsa (5:12)
- 3 Libiamo, ne' lieti calici (3:13)
- 4 Che è ciò? (2:38)
- 5 Un di felice, eterea (6:53)
- 6 È strano! È strano! (4:18)
- 7 Folle! folle! (5:06)
- 8 Act 2 - Lunge da lei (1:58)
- 9 De' miei bollenti spiriti (2:10)
- 10 Annina, dionde vieni? (4:32)
- 11 Pura siccome un angelo (6:52)
- 12 Dite alla giovine (9:06)
- 13 Dammi tu forza, o cielo! (4:20)
- 14 Ah, vive sol quel core all'amor mio! (2:24)
- 15 Di Provenza il mar, il suol (4:49)

CD Two

- 1 Avram lieta di maschere la notte (6:56)
- 2 Alfredo! Voi! (8:53)
- 3 Di sprezzo degno (6:27)
- 4 Act 3 - Prelude (4:39)
- 5 Annina? Comandate? (4:38)
- 6 Teneste la promessa (5:18)
- 7 Largo al quadrupede (0:45)
- 8 Signora! Che t'accade? (1:59)
- 9 Parigi, o cara (7:52)
- 10 Ah Violetta! (6:32)

CAST

Violetta Valéry - **Maria Callas** (*soprano*)
 Alfredo Germont - **Francesco Albanese** (*tenor*)
 Giorgio Germont - **Ugo Savarese** (*baritone*)
 Flora Bervoix - **Ede Marietti Gandolfo** (*mezzo-soprano*)
 Annina - **Ines Marietti** (*soprano*)
 Il Visconte Gaston De Letorières - **Mariano Caruso** (*tenor*)
 Il Barone Douphol - **Alberto Albertini** (*bass*)
 Il Marchese d'Obigny/Dottore Grenvil - **Mario Zorogniotti** (*bass*)
 Giuseppe - **Tommaso Soley** (*tenor*)

Coro Cetra

Orchestra Sinfonica di Torino della RAI **Gabriele Santini**

XR remastering by
Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of **Maria Callas**

Giuseppe Verdi: La Traviata
Libretto: Francesco Maria Piave

Recorded September 1953
Studio del RAI, Turin, Italy

Originally issued in Italy

Issued by Cetra in the UK
in 1958 as LPC1246

Total duration: **2hr 2:07**

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