

COMPACT
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DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO 102

Maria Callas Puccini: La Bohème

Pristine
XR

This Columbia is stamped with two hall marks. One Callas, the other Votto. This conductor is a favourite with singers and one sees why. He manages to give them absolute freedom without losing control of them. The principals here all sound thoroughly happy, thoroughly inside what they are doing, acting with quite unusual subtlety and veracity. The price to be paid is that sometimes Votto seems to be taking the score very slowly indeed. But if that is true, he does not fail to bring in the right kind of surging excitement when that is strongly needed (as I think one can say Erede does fail). For instance that moment where Mimi struggles up the stairs and drags herself into Rudolf's arms half way through the last side—it hasn't quite the immense tug that Beecham gives it, but then Callas is not De Los Angeles, either.

No indeed she is not. The quality at the top is here rubbed bare of all bloom; she does not seem to be able to "soar" as De Los Angeles can, and if that is something you demand of a Puccini heroine, then Callas may disappoint you. Under pressure, all the *spirito* notes in fact show the usual tendency to beat or hover. But how richly does this singer make amends—by sensitivity of another sort, by the luminous meaning she gives to the words (all crystal clear which you can't say of De Los Angeles) and the variety of tonal nuances she gives to the detail (superior in that to the un-changing beauty of Tebaldi). No blurring mars this brilliantly realised brilliant Mimi; no conventional vocal pathos at (say) "Sono andati" on the death-bed (and why should that statement be made in a voice ringing with drama, yet it nearly always is?) The absolute sense of fitness which goes into her contribution to the wonderful pattern which makes up the supper at the Café—the tone is like a wonderful oboist, endowed with speech, arid at a hundred tiny points of characterisation, this Mimi comes alive and later haunts you in a most extraordinary way. As against that if you want a pure welling up of tone—as distinct from some subtle, artful *diminuendo*—you won't get it. She is at her squalliest, and Votto at his slowest, in the Mimi-Marcello duet near the start of Act III. The last notes of a marvellously feeling yet unsentimental "Addio di Mimi" would have given Melba a fit, so wavering are they; and yet I found Callas's Mimi one of the most moving I have ever heard.

P. H.-W., *The Gramophone*, March 1958, *excerpt from original LP issue review*

Producer's Note

This classic recording of one of the most popular and oft-performed operas ever written was very well recorded for its day (though one can only wish somewhat at headquarters in 1956 had pushed for stereo at this point). Alas the current EMI issue, although generally clean and clear, is a rather dull, lifeless affair to listen to. This new transfer with XR remastering brings real life and sparkle to the production, with a sense of real space on the stage especially present in our Ambient Stereo version. On the basis of painstaking investigations of residual electrical hums found on the original recordings I've concluded that the orchestral tuning used here was around 445.5Hz, and this remaster has been tuned accordingly - taking into account, for the first time, tape speed drift and minor speed variations between tape machines over the course of the recording. The result is, I hope, definitive.

Andrew Rose

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
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PACO 102

Maria Callas in La Bohème

by Giacomo Puccini



Solisti, Coro e Orchestra del
Teatro alla Scala, Milano

Antonino Votto, conductor

Columbia studio recording, 1956

PUCCINI *La Bohème*

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CD1

- 1 Act 1 - Questo mar rosso (4:24)
- 2 Pensier profondo! (1:11)
- 3 Abbasso, abbasso l'autor! (3:46)
- 4 Si può? (4:18)
- 5 Al Quartiere Latin (1:43)
- 6 Non sono in vena (3:48)
- 7 Che gelida manina! (5:01)
- 8 Sì. Mi chiamano Mimi (5:38)
- 9 O soave fanciulla (4:17)
- 10 Act 2 - Aranci, datterii! (2:50)
- 11 Chi guardi? (5:39)
- 12 Beviam. Ch'io beva del tossico! (3:18)
- 13 Quando men' vo (4:38)
- 14 Chi l'ha richiesto? (2:34)

CD2

- 1 Act 3 - Ohè, là, le guardie (5:06)
- 2 Mimi?! Speravo di trovarvi qui (4:44)
- 3 Marcello. Finalmente (1:34)
- 4 Mimi è una civetta (4:31)
- 5 D'onde lieta uscì al tuo grido d'amore (3:27)
- 6 Dunque è proprio finita? (5:59)
- 7 Act 4 - In un coupé? (1:16)
- 8 O Mimi, tu più non torni (3:08)
- 9 Che ora sia? (4:06)
- 10 C'è Mimi (5:25)
- 11 Vecchia zimarra, senti (1:30)
- 12 Schaunard, ognuno der diversa via (1:42)
- 13 Sono andanti? (4:39)
- 14 Oh Dio? Mimi! (5:10)

CAST

Mimi - **Maria Callas**
Rodolfo - **Giuseppe di Stefano**
Marcello - **Rolando Panerai**
Schaunard - **Manuel Spatafora**
Colline - **Nicola Zaccaria**
Benoît/Alcindoro - **Carlo Badioli**
Musetta - **Anna Moffo**
Parpignol - **Franco Ricciardi**
Custom House Officer - **Eraldo Coda**
Sergeant - **Carlo Forti**

Chorus & Orchestra of La Scala, Milan
Chorus Master: **Norberto Mola**
Conductor: **Antonino Votto**

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

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Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Maria Callas

Puccini La Bohème
Recording producers:
Walter Legge, Walter Jellinek
Recording Engineer:
Robert Beckett
Recorded 20-25 August, 3-4
September 1956
Teatro alla Scala, Milan

Total duration: 1hr 45:23

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