

MARIA CALLAS in Cherubini's *Medea*

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MARIA CALLAS MEDEA

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HISTORIC REVIEW

When Maria Callas sang *Medea* for the first time at Florence in 1953 (and continued with the role until the early 1960s), it was practically a rediscovery of Cherubini's opera for the 20th century. Unfortunately she and her conductor Vittorio Gui only had access to the corrupt version in Italian translation with stodgy, anachronistic recitatives provided by Wagner's *bête noire* Franz Lachner. The release last January of Bel Air Classiques' live Brussels DVD of Cherubini's original *Médée* reminded us what a masterpiece this French Revolutionary *opéra comique* is.

Nonetheless, Callas was lucky in her conductors of the piece and both Leonard Bernstein — whose fiery La Scala broadcast with the diva was issued a while back by EMI — and Nicola Rescigno, as here, do much to work against the false, inflated tradition of performing the work as a kind of grand opera *manqué*. They may not rewrite Lachner, let alone cut him, but they do at least infuse real drama into the (only really good) recitative that throws *Medea* like a bomb on to the stage to interrupt the wedding preparations of Jason and the Corinthian princess the Italian text calls Glauce (*recte* Dirce).

Also, and this is a big plus for this performance, the Jason is no less than Jon Vickers, something of a Covent Garden regular in 1959 and here singing with a tonal beauty not always present in his later Siegmunds, Tristans and Samsons. Callas herself — in the middle of a period where she was accused of loving the yacht-set high life more than music — is in terrific form in a role whose lower tessitura was beginning to suit her well. A non-love affair (or an ex-love affair) is harder to convey dramatically than burning present passion but the Callas/Vickers team put this over clearly. The support is strong — Zaccaria as the appeaser Creonte, our own Joan Carlyle as Glauce and Cossotto who makes much of servant Neris's big Act 2 aria.

Mike Ashman, *Gramophone*, January 2014

Producer's Note

Normally the historic reviews included in our notes date back 50-80 years, yet this release bears a review barely a year old. What could possibly justify revisiting a recording most recently issued (under official license) less than 18 months ago? Quite simply, the colossal leap forward in sound quality afforded by the discovery of source recordings that, even in their raw state, were streets ahead of any previous CD issue of this hugely important historic broadcast performance. The recording was taped from the high quality live FM broadcast on the BBC's Third Programme onto high speed open reel tape, and reproduces the event in a way that the existing CDs only hint at. There were two very brief sections where tape changes required patching, and three or four moments of very brief tape dropout to fix towards the end of the first act; these aside, the broadcast has been marvellously preserved, together with BBC announcements. XR remastering has only served to further enhance such excellent source material, almost totally eliminating tape hiss, and bringing forth a full and brilliant live sound that frequently matches — and in some cases exceeds — the quality of Maria Callas's studio recordings made in her 1950s heyday. No opera lover or Maria Callas fan can surely afford to be without this *Medea*!

Andrew Rose

CHERUBINI MEDEA

Medea Maria Callas
Giasone Jon Vickers
Glauce Joan Carlyle
Neris Fiorenza Cossotto
Creonte Nicola Zaccaria
Prima ancella Mary Wells
Seconda ancella Elizabeth Rust
Capo delle guardie David Allen

Covent Garden Opera
Chorus and Orchestra
Nicola Rescigno

*Live recording:
Royal Opera House, London, 1959*



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CHERUBINI MEDEA
CALLAS, VICKERS, COVENT GARDEN OPERA CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA, RESCIGNO

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO 119

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph
of Maria Callas and Jon Vickers
as Medea and Giasone in the 1959
Royal Opera House production

Broadcast live from the
Royal Opera House, London
BBC Radio Third Programme
Tuesday 30 June 1959

Total duration: 2 hr 14:22

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CHERUBINI *Medea*

CD 1

1 Radio Introduction (2:32)

2 ACT 1: Overture (6:58)

3 Introduction: Che? Quando gia corona (6:13)

4 Io cedo all buona preghiera - O Amore, vieni a me (6:11)

5 No, non temer (2:22)

6 O bella Glauce - Colco! Pensier fatal (4:32)

7 Or che piu non vedro - Ah, gia troppo turbo (4:10)

8 Pronube dive (5:50)

9 Signor! Ferma una donna - Qui tremar? (6:33)

10 Taci, Giason - Dei tuoi figli la madre (8:01)

11 Son vane pui minacce - Nemici senza cor (5:09)

CD 2

1 ACT II - Introduction (1:45)

2 Soffrir non posso - Data almen, per pieta (14:10)

3 Medea! o Medea! - Solo un pianto (8:31)

4 Creonte a me solo - Figli mie (9:12)

5 Hai dato pronto? - Ah! Triste cantol? (10:37)

6 ACT III - Introduction (4:26)

7 Numi, venite a me (5:54)

8 Del fiero duol (4:18)

9 D'amore il raggio ancora - Finale E che? Io son Medea! (17:00)

Chorus and Orchestra of The Covent Garden Opera
Nicola Rescigno, conductor

