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DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO 127

Verdi - Aïda

MILANOV, BJÖRLING, BARBIERI, WARREN, CHRISTOFF

Pristine
XR

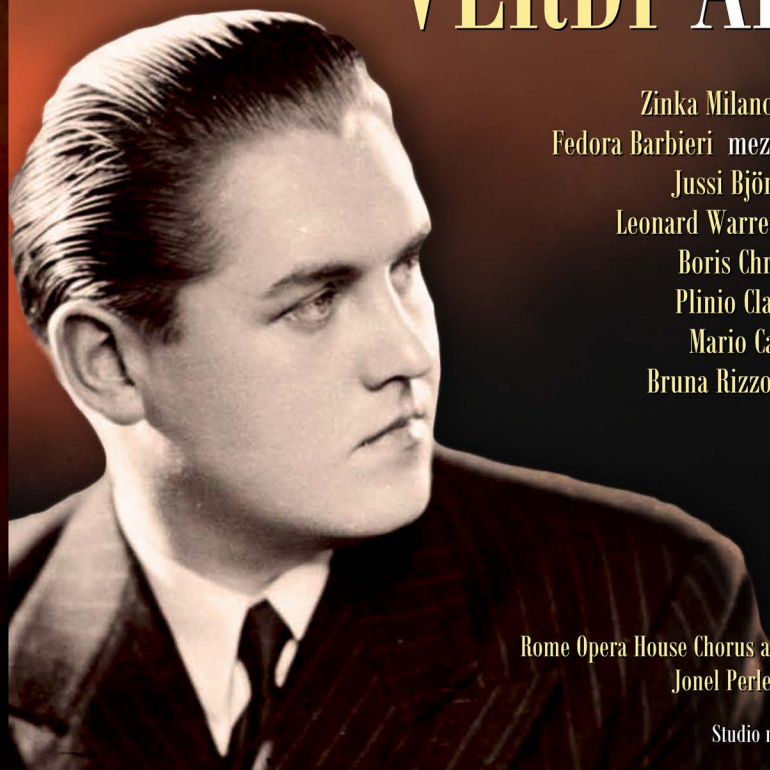
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VERDI Aïda

Zinka Milanov soprano
Fedora Barbieri mezzo-soprano
Jussi Björling tenor
Leonard Warren baritone
Boris Christoff bass
Plinio Clabassi bass
Mario Carlin tenor
Bruna Rizzoli soprano

Rome Opera House Chorus and Orchestra
Jonel Perlea conductor

Studio recording 1955



For the capturing of sound and reproduction the latest version listed above is the best to date; or so I have found. It is extremely natural sounding, full, resonant but quite without distortions and the singers don't seem too close as they do in Columbia's Nile Scene. Mme Milanov's many beautiful soft high notes (which one was beginning to think no Aida attempted any more, despite Tebaldi's good contribution) are caught floating, so to speak. It is that—the sailing, seraphic high piano of the eponymous heroine, which next in order seems to me to commend the issue. If Callas was more of an actress, she was much less steady as a singer; and both times the "Numi pietà del mio soffir" phrases are done by Milanov with more quality than Tebaldi. In the duet with Amonasro that crucial lament "O patria, patria quanto mi costi?" is exquisitely done and even though my impression was that this Aida was thinking more of her singing method than of her country, I do prefer that to Callas who, rapt in imaginative intensity in the significance of the words, allowed a zagging beat to invade the magic of the phrase. Also in the last duet Milanov really does seem like an angel as the tenor says she does. It is a joy to be able to report piano held, pearly notes joined by a perfectly sustained legato.

Next on the list is the mezzo Barbieri, also in the Columbia set and obviously the best of current interpreters of the role. Honours are easy here, then. For sheer beefiness, staying power and a rich and menacing contrast to the womanly Aida she is about all you could possibly want (unless you demand subtlety in Amneris, I don't, B flats and stamina being more important and also irreplaceable—as anyone who has endured a ladylike or "artistic but old" Amneris will agree). The voice is more contralto-coloured than Stignani's and without denigrating that fine singer, I think we have now found a successor no less gorgeous.

For Radames I have a weakness still for Columbia's Tucker, though he loses quality on lower notes. Del Monaco was fine in the fiery bits of the Nile scene on Decca, but downright appalling, in my opinion, in "Celeste Aida", which I wouldn't sit through again if I could help it. At least Björling never falls below a certain distinction of style, but I may as well say frankly (as a great admirer) that I was a little disappointed in him once or twice. His voice is in average shape, but not at its vital best (that silver trumpet we heard in his Manrico at Covent Garden in the 1930's). He needs a lot of effort to manage some of his high notes and though he warms up, getting better and better as the opera proceeds, he is not quite the ringing, passionate ultra-heroic Radames of one's dreams. All the same, for those who put phrasing first, he must be the most musically Radames since Martinelli, and if you think how rare it is, in the flesh at even the greatest opera houses of the world, to hear the part not absolutely murdered from end to end, you'll be very unlikely to complain except as a luxury about anything that Björling does. It's only for faint regrets about what he doesn't do (e.g. a perfectly poised, dreamy close to "Celeste Aida") that I raise any doubts at all.

Warren, solid and sturdy baritone though he be, must I think yield to Gobbi (Columbia), whose whole conception of the part, if not better sung, qua vocalisation, was far more alive dramatically (compare the Act 2 "Anch'io pugnai" or the Act 2 duet at the words "Pensa che un popolo . . ."). But he is better than Decca's Protti. Christoff is of course an immensely dramatic Ramfis, but he should try to sing the part as Pinza used to—with an absolutely true line. A high priest who sings off key and blusters forfeits respect.

The orchestral playing is of fine quality without, strings apart, astonishing us by its beauty; pure poetry is not coaxed out of the Egyptian night, nor is our hair set upright in the Act 3 ensemble. The chorus is satisfactory. Maestro Perlea is accommodating but less easy going than Erede, more flexible and less stately than Serafin, quick to take advantage of the thrilling chance, the slight crescendo or real slancio. But he is no Toscanini, no Beecham, nor—in the Guerra chorus, for instance—as exciting as Barbirolli.

All in all, for modern recording, reproduction, solo contributions (with exceptions to prove the rule) and value, this is the best complete Aida to date.

P.H.-W., *The Gramophone*, November 1956, excerpts - further notes can be found at our website

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VERDI Aida (CD2)
MILANOV, BJÖRLING, BARBIERI, WARREN, CHRISTOFF, ROME OPERA HOUSE ORCHESTRA, PERLEA

CD 1

1

Preludio

(3:20)

2

Act 1, Scene 1 - Sì: corre voce che l'Etiope ardisca

(1:46)

3

Se quel guerrier io fossi!

(4:49)

4

Quale insolito gioia nel tuo sguardo

(3:30)

5

Vieni, o diletta, appressati

(2:47)

6

Alta cagion v'aduna

(3:04)

7

Sul del Nilo al sacro lido

(2:55)

8

Ritorna vincitor

(6:30)

9

Scene 2 - Possente, possente Fthà

(3:48)

10

Immenso, immenso Fthà!

(3:30)

11

Nume, custode e vindice

(4:15)

12

Act 2, Scene 1 - Chi mai fra gl'inni e i plausi

(2:57)

13

Danza di piccoli schiavi mori

(3:02)

14

Fu la sorte dell'armi a' tuoi funesta

(5:33)

15

Pietà ti prenda del mio dolor

(4:39)

16

Scene 2 - Gloria all'Egitto, ad Iside

(3:21)

17

Marchia trionfale

(1:33)

18

Ballabile

(4:19)

19

Vieni, o guerriero vindice

(2:08)

20

Salvator della patria, io ti saluta

(1:54)

21

Che veggio! Egli? Mio padre!

(1:04)

CD 2

1

Quest'assisa ch'io vesto vi dica

(2:32)

2

Il dolor che in quel volto favella

(2:14)

3

O Re: pei sacri Numi

(5:50)

4

Act 3 - O tu che sei d'Osiride

(4:18)

5

Qui Radamès verrà!

(7:05)

6

Ciel! mio padre!

(8:06)

7

Pur ti riveggo, mia dolce Aida

(3:15)

8

Fuggiam gli ardori inospiti

(6:30)

9

Ma dimmi: per qual via

(3:21)

10

Act 4, Scene 1 - L'aborrita rivale a me sfuggia

(3:14)

11

Già i Sacerdoti adunansi

(6:40)

12

Ohimè! morir mi sento!

(8:04)

13

A lui vivo la tomba

(3:05)

14

Scene 2 - La fatal pietra sovra me si chiuse

(5:45)

15

Immenso, immenso Fthà

(6:03)

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CAST

Aida, an Ethiopian princess - Zinka Milanov
Amneris, daughter of the King of Egypt - Fedora Barbieri
Rhadames, captain of the guard - Jussi Björling
Amonasro, King of Ethiopia - Leonard Warren
Ramfis, high priest - Boris Christoff
The King of Egypt - Plinio Clabassi
A Messenger - Mario Carlin
Priestess - Bruna Rizzoli

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Jussi Björling

Recorded 2-18 July, 1955
Teatro dell'Opera di Roma

Total duration: 2hr 26:44

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