

Maria Callas

VERDI - RIGOLETTO

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XR

That one recording should continue to hold sway over many other attractive comers after so long is simply a tribute to Callas, Gobbi, Serafin and Walter Legge. Whatever the merits of its successors, and they are many, no *Rigoletto* has surpassed Gobbi in tonal variety, line, projection of character and understanding of what *Rigoletto* is about; no Gilda has come anywhere near Callas in meaningful phrasing – listen to ‘Caro nome’ or ‘Tutte le feste’ on any other set if you’re disbelieving – nor achieved such a careful differentiation of timbre before and after her seduction; no conductor matches Serafin in judging tempo and instrumental detail on a nicety; nor benefited from a chorus and orchestra bred in the tradition of La Scala; no producer has equalled Legge in recording voices rather than the space round them. And di Stefano? Well, he may not be so stylish a Duke as some others, but the ‘face’ he gives his singing, and the sheer physical presence he conveys, not to mention his forward diction, are also unique in this opera.

Nothing in this world is perfect, so there are some small drawbacks here. Serafin sadly makes small cuts in the first Gilda-Rigoletto duet and omits entirely the Duke’s cabaletta as used to be the practice in the theatre. Gobbi could be said not to have quite the weight of voice ideally called for by a Verdi baritone role. Finally, the recording, although immeasurably improved from previous issues of the set, still has one or two places of distortion obviously present on the original tape. In every other way, this remains the classic performance on record.

Gramophone, February 2015

How enduringly fresh this masterpiece remains. Hear it a hundred times a year yet given a reasonably good performance, one is amazed all over again. Needless to add, with a cast like the above, this is a good performance and one which Gobbi and Callas fans will leap at. Pity the critic then who must make some cool observations on what is in the main a highly pleasurable and heart-warming experience...

The present recording has one or two recessive places, a certain “milk-juggy” resonance once and some indifferent balance in one choral episode, but the balance in some difficult ensembles, i.e. the quartet, is actually truer than on H.M.V. and all in all, supposing that your reproducer is a good one, you should receive a thrilling impression of what no doubt was a pretty exciting performance...

The Gramophone, February 1956 (excerpts)

Producer's Note

Between the summer of 1954 and September 1955, the legendary EMI producer Walter Legge recorded no less than six full operas at La Scala, Milan, with Maria Callas in a leading role. *Rigoletto* was the sixth of these. It is almost impossible to imagine such a productive work-rate today, and yet this amazingly productive period, with Callas at the height of her powers, produced some of the defining recordings of the operatic canon – not least the present offering. The recording team were by now exceptionally familiar with the venue, and in an era of mono recording where the primary concern was capturing the voices and balancing them against the instruments, rather than the stereo presentation of a staged drama that would soon follow, it was no doubt easier to make these recordings than it would later become. Nevertheless, it took 13 days to record *Rigoletto*, and in this restoration I've encountered minor differences in recordings made on different days – slightly intrusive traffic noise here, peak distortion there – which I've hopefully dealt with to the listener's satisfaction. Some minor pitch discrepancies have been ironed out. But the main contribution here has been to open out the sound and lift something of a veil from the performance, with Ambient Stereo XR remastering bringing a greater sense of life, clarity and immediacy to the proceedings throughout. **Andrew Rose**

MARIA CALLAS

VERDI Rigoletto

Rigoletto - Tito Gobbi
Gilda - Maria Callas
Duca di Mantova - Giuseppe di Stefano
Sparafucile - Nicola Zaccaria
Maddalena - Adriana Lazzarini
Giovanna - Giuse Gerbino
Monterone - Plinio Clabassi
Marullo - William Dickie
Borsa - Renato Ercolani
Conte di Ceperano - Carlo Forti
Contessa di Ceperano - Elvira Galassi
Un usciere - Vittorio Tatzoli
Un paggio - Luisa Mandelli

Chorus and Orchestra of La Scala, Milan
Tullio Serafin conductor

Studio recording, 1955

Pristine
XR

VERDI *Rigoletto*



XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph
of Maria Callas

Verdi Rigoletto

Recording producer: Walter Legge

Recording Engineer: Robert Beckett

Recorded 3-16 September 1955

Teatro alla Scala, Milan

Total duration: 1hr 57:57

- CD 1
- 1 Prelude (2:22)
 - 2 Act One, Scene 1 - Della mia bella incognita borghese (1:42)
 - 3 Questa o quella per me pari sono (4:21)
 - 4 Gran nuova! Gran nuova! (2:31)
 - 5 Ch'io gli parli (4:26)

- 6 Scene 2 - Quel vecchio maledivami! (4:29)
- 7 Pari siamo! (3:45)
- 8 Figlia! ... Mio padre! (6:39)
- 9 Ah, veglia, o donna (5:09)
- 10 Giovanni, ho dei rimorsi (6:38)
- 11 Che m'ami, deh, ripetimi (1:42)
- 12 Gualtier Maldè!... Caro nome (7:27)
- 13 Riedo! ... Perché? (2:08)
- 14 Zitti, zitti (2:56)

- CD 2
- 1 Act Two - Ella mi fu rapita! (5:24)
 - 2 Duca, duca! (2:26)
 - 3 Povero Rigoletto! (4:00)
 - 4 Cortigiani, vil razza dannata (4:26)
 - 5 Mio padre! ... Tutte le feste al tempio (9:07)
 - 6 Schiudete, ire al carcere (3:12)

- 7 Act Three - E l'ami? (2:01)
- 8 La donna è mobile (3:13)
- 9 Un dì, se bel rammentomi (1:34)
- 10 Bella figlia dell'amore (4:58)
- 11 Venti scudi hai tu detto? (4:31)
- 12 Ah, piu non ragiono (5:27)
- 13 Della vendetta alfin giunge l'istante! (6:45)
- 14 V'ho ingannato, colpevole fui (4:39)

Coro e Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala, Milano Tullio Serafin

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