



Verdi

Un Ballo in Maschera



If fortune had smiled on us we would have two very good recordings of Jussi Björling in *Un Ballo in Maschera*. He was scheduled to appear in the 1954 radio broadcast with Toscanini and the NBC Symphony Orchestra but had to pull out due to laryngitis. Illness also forced him to pull out of the Decca recording in Rome in the summer of 1960 opposite Birgit Nilsson. Just a few months later he was dead. Opera fans were thus denied the chance to hear Jussi Björling in one of his signature roles. The Decca recording in particular would have captured him in excellent stereo. Yet all is not lost. This broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera in December 1940 captures Björling at his youthful best, not yet 30 years old, singing with all the passion one could want in a live performance.

Although Björling had sung his first *Ballo* in Sweden in 1934, this was actually only his 6th performance as Riccardo. The Met mounted a new production of the opera, having neglected to perform it for the previous 24 years, and granted it the honour of opening night. This was the first of Björling's eleven Met broadcasts, and therefore the large domestic broadcast audience of more than ten million (plus the international audience listening via shortwave in Latin America and Europe), heard not only an unfamiliar opera, but also a new tenor. The reviews following opening night were complimentary, praising Björling's 'lyricism' and 'style', and indeed the role suits his bright instrument perfectly. He is reserved where the role requires it, but often vocally impassioned in a way that belies his undeserved reputation as 'cold'. His Amelia is Zinka Milanov, well-known to the Met audience and regularly partnered with Björling by record companies in the 1950s. The two occasionally sang together in concerts and Toscanini had used them as soloists in the Verdi *Requiem* less than a month before this broadcast of *Ballo*. Her strong vibrant soprano provides a lovely counterpoint to Björling's burnished tone, and the big duet in act 3 is a particular highlight (N.B. this Met production split *Ballo* into 5 acts - our track titling for this release references the original three to avoid confusion).

Singing Renato is Hungarian baritone Alexander Sved, indeed the opening night performance was his Met debut. His 'Eri tu' is large-voiced and nobly sung. He had performed with Björling in Vienna in 1936 and 1937 and recordings of part of those performances survive. Italian mezzo, Bruna Castagna, sings Ulrica and was heard often at the Met as Carmen, Amneris and Azucena. She retired in 1945 at the age of just 48. English soprano Stella Andreva, singing Oscar, appeared at the Met in a variety of light soprano roles such as Musetta, Papagena, and the Woodbird between 1937 and 1942. She sang similar roles at Covent Garden, but in Stockholm she sang Gilda to Björling's Duke, Rosina to his Almaviva, and sang Juliette in his very first *Romeo et Juliette*. In 1946 she performed on Broadway in Lehar's *Yours is my heart*.

Conductor Ettore Panizza performed all over the world and was a house conductor at the Met between 1934 and 1942. More than 40 of his Met performances were broadcast including the 1935 *La Traviata* with Rosa Ponselle, and the same year's *Simon Boccanegra* with Lawrence Tibbett.

The broadcast was recorded onto 16-inch transcription discs by NBC from a direct line feed. The quality of materials used had clearly improved since the early days of NBC transcription discs and every single broadcast from this 1940-41 season, the first sponsored by the Texas Company, is preserved.

PACO 140

verdi

un ballo in maschera

zinka milanov
jussi björiling
alexander sved
bruna castagna
stella andreva

norman cordon
nicola moscona
arthur kent
john carter
lodovico oliviero

metropolitan opera orchestra & chorus
conducted by etторе panizza
live broadcast recording, 1940



CD 1 VERDI Un Ballo in Maschera

ACT 1

- 1 RADIO Introduction (0:23)
- 2 Act 1, Scene 1 - Prelude (3:52)
- 3 Posa in pace (1:33)
- 4 Amici miei...soldati - La rivedrà nell'estasi (3:51)
- 5 Il cenno mio de là (2:16)
- 6 Alla vita che t'arride (3:00)
- 7 Il primo giudice (1:26)
- 8 Cavatina: Volta la terrea (1:55)
- 9 Signori oggi d'Ulrica...Orni cura si doni al diletto (2:59)

- 10 Act 1, Scene 2 - Zitti, l'incanto non dessi turbare (3:38)
- 11 Arrivo il primo...Villano, dà indietro (2:45)
- 12 Su fatemi largo (3:17)
- 13 Che v'agita così (5:20)
- 14 Su profetessa monta il treppiè (4:07)
- 15 Chi voi siate l'audace parola (6:14)
- 16 Finale - Finisci il vaticinio (4:11)

CD 2

- 1 Act 2 - Prelude - Ecco l'orrido campo (9:28)

ACT 2

- 2 Teco io sto...Gran Dio (9:08)

ACT 3

- 3 Ahimè!...s'appressa alcun! (4:54)
- 4 Seguitemi!...Mio Dio! (7:42)

- 5 Act 3, Scene 1 - A tal colpo è nulla il pianto (6:41)
- 6 Alzati! Là tuo figlio a te concede riveder (6:58)
- 7 Siam soli...udite (8:14)
- 8 Alle danze questa sera (6:03)
- 9 Forse la soglia attinse (2:28)

- 10 Act 3, Scene 2 - Ah! Dessa è là (Festa de Ballo e Coro) (5:37)
- 11 Fervono amori e danze (1:24)
- 12 Ah! Perchè qui!.. fuggite (5:16)
- 13 Finale - Ella è pura, in braccio a morte (5:36)

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus *Ettore Panizza*
Broadcast performance of 14 December, 1940



COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO 140

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph
of Jussi Björling

Total duration: 2hr 10:18

CAST

Amelia - Zinka Milanov
Riccardo - Jussi Björling
Renato - Alexander Sved
Ulrica - Bruna Castagna
Oscar - Stella Andreva
Samuel - Norman Cordon
Tom - Nicola Moscona
Silvano - Arthur Kent
Judge - John Carter
Servant - Lodovico Oliviero

Dance - Douglas Coudy
Dance - Alexis Kosloff
Dance - Josef Levinoff
Dance - Mary Smith
Dance - Lillian Moore
Dance - Mary Sigler
Dance - Paul Sweeney
Dance - Lilla Volkova

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