

Verdi Rigoletto

Pristine
XR

Jussi Björling and Leonard Warren shared a remarkably similar career path. Both were born in 1911, Björling in Borlänge, Sweden and Warren a couple of months later in New York. Both had the major part of their careers at the Metropolitan Opera House, Björling making his debut in November 1938, Warren in January 1939. Warren died on stage at the Met during a performance of *La Forza del Destino* in March 1960, Björling died at home in Sweden a few months later. Neither reached fifty years old. Although it is tempting to muse on opportunities lost and roles never sung, it is better to focus on what both artists achieved both individually and together.

Warren appeared at the Met more than 600 times in his 21-year career, but was partnered with Björling only twenty-six times. He was heard as Rigoletto by the radio audience in nine matinee broadcasts between 1943 and 1959, but this is the only one with Björling. Warren was, without doubt, the supreme Verdi baritone of his generation. His warm, velvet voice was capable of conveying subtleties of emotion and had the power to reach to the back of the Old Met with ease. His high notes, and Verdi wrote plenty, were unstrained and he could reach a high G or even A-flat without ever losing the baritone grounding of his voice. His portrayal of Rigoletto focused on the paternal relationship with Gilda, and less on the court jester. He recorded the role commercially with RCA in 1950.

Jussi Björling's last Met performance before the war had been in *Rigoletto* on 27 February 1941. He spent the next four years in his native Sweden and his first Met performance on his return, on 29 November 1945 was once again *Rigoletto*. Björling was 34 in 1945, and although he recorded the opera commercially in 1956 with Robert Merrill in the title role, this broadcast captures him as the ideal Duke with the added excitement of a live performance. His bright youthful tone seems just right for the Duke's callous playboy image, and his arias in the first and last acts are wonderfully carefree.

Gilda is sung by Brazilian soprano Bidú Sayão. Sayão was older than both Warren and Björling and would live to be 96. She made her major international name as a lyric-coloratura soprano in Milan and Paris in the early 1930s before arriving in the US in 1935. Sayão sang at the Met between 1937 and 1952, most notably as Massenet's *Manon*, Mimi in *La Bohème* and Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and was heard on matinee broadcasts thirty-seven times. She only sang Gilda on seven occasions at the Met, two of which were broadcast, but judging from this broadcast she had a touching vulnerability that was well-suited to the role. She would partner Björling in broadcasts of *La Bohème* and *Roméo et Juliette* but the only other broadcast with Warren was a 1943 *La Traviata*.

Italian-born Cesare Sodero conducts the opera. Sodero had come to the US in 1906 as a twenty-year-old and spent most of his career conducting opera and concerts on the radio. In 1942 he joined the conducting staff the Met and would conduct more than two hundred performances before his death in 1947.



- CD1
- 1 Act I - Prelude (2:18)
 - 2 Della mia bella incognita borghese (1:45)
 - 3 Questa o quella (2:05)
 - 4 Partite? Crudele! (2:19)
 - 5 Gran nuova! Gran nuova! (2:42)
 - 6 Ch'io glí parli - Oh tu che la festa audace hai turbato (5:22)
 - 7 Quel vecchio maledivami! (4:23)
 - 8 Pari siamo! (3:41)
 - 9 Figlia! Mio padre! - Deh non parlare al misero (6:41)
 - 10 Ah! veglia, o donna (3:21)
 - 11 Giovanna, ho dei rimosi - È il sol dell'anima (6:45)
 - 12 Che m'amí, deh! Ripetimi - Addio, addio speranza ed anima (1:58)
 - 13 Gualtier Maldè! - Caro nome che il mio cor (6:58)
 - 14 Riedo!... Perchè? (2:08)
 - 15 Zitti, zitti moviamo a vendetta (4:04)
- CD2
- 1 Act II - Ella mi fu rapita!... Parmi veder le lagrime (5:50)
 - 2 Duca, duca! - Scorrendo uniti remota via (2:03)
 - 3 Povero Rigoletto! (3:34)
 - 4 Cortigiani, vil razza dannata (4:44)
 - 5 Mio padre! - Dio! Mia Gilda! (1:36)
 - 6 Parla siam soli - Tutte le feste al tempio (7:53)
 - 7 Compiuto pur quanto - Sì, vendetta, tremenda vendetta (4:48)
 - 8 Act III - E l'amí? - Sempre (2:02)
 - 9 La donna è mobile (2:58)
 - 10 Un dì, se ben rammentomi (1:37)
 - 11 Bella figlia dell'amore (4:31)
 - 12 M'odi! - Venti scudi, hai tu detto? (4:33)
 - 13 Ah piu non ragiono (5:20)
 - 14 Della vendetta alfin giunge l'istante! (4:29)
 - 15 Chi e mai, chi e qui in sua vece? - V'ho ingannato... (6:22)

Orchestra & Chorus of the Metropolitan Opera *Cesare Sodero*



PACO 143

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph of Leonard Warren as Rigoletto

Total duration: 1hr 58:51

CAST

Rigoletto - Leonard Warren
Gilda - Bidú Sayão
Duke of Mantua - Jussi Björling
Maddalena - Martha Lipton
Sparafucile - Norman Cordon
Monterone - William Hargrave
Borsa - Richard Manning
Marullo - George Cehanovsky
Count Ceprano - John Baker
Countess Ceprano - Maxine Stellman
Giovanna - Thelma Altman
Page - Thelma Altman

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