

Puccini

La Bohème

Pristine
XR

There are various ways of listening to a new complete recording of an opera: some people apparently go through it, comparing each phrase with the way it was sung by Ferrani, Sammarco, Vanni-Marcoux or some other semi-legendary figure: I prefer to listen to the work as a whole, judging the singing in the main as a part of the total dramatic effect. (It is a truism worth repeating that an opera is not merely an extended vocal display but a presentation of dramatic action to music.) However, though there may have been bigger voices in the past, and though the top-note fanatics may remember, for example, longer and better high Cs at the end of Act I (where Puccini actually indicated only a bar-and-a-half's duration), it will I think be generally admitted that it would be difficult at the present day to gather a better cast than this - a cast in which there are no weak spots at all. Two sterling qualities stand out right away, qualities so rare in most singing to-day (especially Italian singing) as to be astonishing - intelligence and taste. Here are none of those tiresome "traditions" and vocal tricks (e.g. the last note of *ehe gelida manina* as a *portamento* C-E flat "di-hir" rather than a plain E flat "dir" as in the score); and, most amazing of all, here is a whole company actually observing *pianissimo* and *diminuendo* markings instead of trying to stun the back of the gallery with the force of their lungs - and, of course, making the music sound infinitely more moving in the process. Hooray for Erede!

Add to this that the work has been handled by engineers who obviously have heard opera for themselves in the theatre and know that the orchestra is as important as the singers and that a sense of stage perspective is desirable when making operatic records, and you will understand why I rate this issue as one of the best complete operas so far. The illusion of performance is admirable: the microphone placing is such that, for instance, we comprehend immediately that (before *O soave fanciulla*) the Bohemians' voices come up to the lovers from the street, or that (in act 3) the point of vision is the toll-keeper's booth, with the sweepers behind the barrier and Musetta in the tavern. Let me say, however, that the weak spot in this otherwise excellent issue is the quality of the orchestral recording (not the playing, which is as good as may be heard): the tone is fuzzy and out of focus, and though none of the later acts is as bad as act 1, the general effect is disappointing: on side 2 there is some buzziness at the start, and soprano high As and Bs become distorted.

But the merits of this issue are great enough to overcome these technical shortcomings. Tebaldi makes a charming and unaffected Mimi, whose *Addio senza rancor* and death-bed reminiscence of her first meeting with Rodolfo are most touching, and who only once - in *Mi chiamano Mimi* - from force of habit becomes the singer rather than the little milliner. Prandelli, with his lighter lyrical style, saves Rodolfo from being the crashing egotistical bore he too often is; his sensitivity and his *dolcissimo* singing are worthy of what has been called the sincerest form of flattery. All the rest of the cast are good, and a special word is due to Gueden, who despite the parrot cries that she is "insufficiently Italian," sings Musetta stylishly without the shrillness we get from most Italian interpreters of the part.

L.S., The Gramophone, January 1952

PACO 179

puccini

la bohème

renata tebaldi mimi
giacinto prandelli rodolfo

hilde gueden musetta
giovanni inghilleri marcello
fernando corena schauvard
raphael arié colline
piero de palma parpignol
melchiorre luise benoit & alcindoro
ildebrando santafe sergeant

santa cecilia academy
chorus & orchestra
conducted by alberto erede

studio recording, 1951

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COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO 179

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph of Renata Tebaldi as Mimi in La Bohème, early 1950s

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Santa Cecilia, Rome, Italy

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Recording Engineer: Gil Went

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disc one

ACT ONE

1. Questo mar rosso (4:28)
2. Pensier profondo! (1:08)
3. Abbasso, abbasso l'autor! (3:45)
4. Si può? (4:07)
5. Al Quartiere Latin (1:48)
6. Non sono in vena (3:50)
7. Che gelida manina! (5:06)
8. Sì. Mi chiamano Mimi (5:44)
9. O soave fanciulla (4:12)

ACT TWO

10. Aranci, datter! (2:36)
11. Chi guardi? (5:14)
12. Beviem. Ch'io beva del tossico! (3:08)
13. Quando men' vo (4:27)
14. Chi l'ha richiesto? (2:29)

CAST

Renata Tebaldi (soprano) - Mimi
Hilde Gueden (soprano) - Musetta
Giacinto Prandelli (tenor) - Rodolfo
Giovanni Inghilleri (baritone) - Marcello
Fernando Corena (bass) - Schaunard
Raphael Arié (bass) - Colline
Piero de Palma (tenor) - Parpignol
Melchiorre Luise (bass) - Benoit & Alcindoro
Ildebrando Santafe (bass) - Sergeant

disc two

ACT THREE

1. Ohè, là, le guardie (4:46)
2. Mimi?! Speravo di trovarvi qui (4:47)
3. Marcello. Finalmente (1:39)
4. Mimi è una civetta (4:18)
5. D'onde lieta uscì al tuo grido d'amore (3:05)
6. Dunque è proprio finita? (5:45)

ACT FOUR

7. In un coupé? (1:19)
8. O Mimi, tu più non torni (2:49)
9. Che ora sia? (4:04)
10. C'è Mimi (5:39)
11. Vecchia zimarra, senti (1:54)
12. Schaunard, ognuno der diversa via (1:44)
13. Sono andanti? (4:56)
14. Oh Dio? Mimi! (5:45)

Santa Cecilia Academy Chorus and Orchestra
conducted by Alberto Erede