

Verdi Rigoletto

Pristine
XR

"My top [*Rigoletto*] recommendation – although it comes with a caveat – comes from Florence. In June 1960 Mercury's Living Presence mobile recording truck arrived at the Teatro della Pergola. Under the direction of Wilma Cozart Fine, Mercury's three-microphone set-up captured this thrilling account by the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino under Gianandrea Gavazzeni, who paces things perfectly. It boasts a splendid, youthful cast.

Alfredo Kraus is an aristocratic Duke (he was just 32), with wonderful flexibility to his tenor. Fiorenza Cossotto (25) is a voluptuous Maddalena, Ivo Vinco (32) a sonorous Sparafucile. Renata Scotto (26) is all wide-eyed innocence and purity as Gilda, with a great diminuendo in 'Caro nome' and some very moving vocal acting. Ettore Bastianini (37) is Rigoletto, his magnificent 'bronze and velvet' baritone full of mockery, bitterness and fury; the Vendetta duet really zings. Philip Hope-Wallace disliked Bastianini: 'There is a wounded animal sound in his Curse on the courtiers and primitive tearing rage in his Vendetta.' It's these very qualities that I want from a *Rigoletto*! PHW pretty much torpedoed the entire set 60 years ago. It's time to set the record straight.

That caveat, though. The recording – a joint project by Mercury and Ricordi – has never had a fully satisfactory CD transfer. The sound on the latest Urania reissue (probably the best transfer) still strikes me as murky. The ears adjust quickly but it's not ideal, especially when one goes back to the original LPs. I own an early Mercury pressing which still sounds splendid, along with a Ricordi set, plus one on DG, which was licensed to release it in Germany, complete with fold-out photo of Bastianini in costume taken from when he appeared in the production at La Scala. My advice is, try before you buy; and if Urania's sound isn't for you, then Solti will provide a highly theatrical standby until someone, somewhere, gives this Gavazzeni set the CD transfer it thoroughly deserves."

Mark Pullinger, *Gramophone*, October 2021

A lengthy round-up in *Gramophone* magazine of all the recorded editions of Verdi's *Rigoletto* couldn't have come at a better time - or with a better "winner" - for this release. Having secured two tickets to hear the opera in its original home, *La Fenice* in Venice, I set about totally absorbing myself in the music for a week or two. What better way than to find a superb vintage recording to restore - and to release it at Pristine the day after hearing it in the fabled opera house where 170 years ago it was premièred?

I had already begun work on a slightly earlier *Rigoletto* recording when this review appeared, but the line "*has never had a fully satisfactory CD transfer*" was a game-stopper. I immediately stopped work and went online to seek out a copy of one of the Gavazzeni/Bastianini LP releases that could be shipped in time for a thorough transfer and restoration. I'm happy to say this was achieved in good time, with a set of excellent DG pressings from Germany.

Having heard the quality of the *Urania* CD referred to in *Gramophone*'s article I can easily understand the reviewer's frustration at the frankly dismal and vastly over-processed sound of that release. I hope this fabulous, XR-remastered reissue serves to rectify this shortcoming, and restore this - surely one of (if not the) greatest of *Rigoletto* recordings - to its rightful place in any opera-lover's collection.

Andrew Rose



verdi

rigoletto



disc one

ACT ONE

1. **Prelude** (2:06)
2. **Scene 1** - Della mia bella incognita borghese (1:48)
3. Questa o quella per me pari sono (4:06)
4. Gran nuova, Gran nuova (2:35)
5. Ch'io gli parli (4:53)
6. **Scene 2** - Quel vecchio maledivami (5:09)
7. Pari siamo (3:49)
8. Figlia... Mio padre (6:17)
9. Ah, veglia, o donna (5:18)
10. Giovanni, ho dei rimorsi (5:34)
11. Che m'ami, deh, ripetimi (1:43)
12. Gualtier Malde... Caro nome (7:04)
13. Riedo... Perche (2:12)
14. Zitti, zitti (3:00)

CAST

Rigoletto - Ettore Bastianini
Gilda - Renata Scotto
Duca di Mantova - Alfredo Kraus
Sparafucile - Ivo Vinco
Maddalena - Fiorenza Cossotto
Giovanna - Clara Foti
Monterone - Silvio Maionica
Marullo - Virgilio Carbonari
Borsa - Enzo Guagni
Conte di Ceprano - Giuseppe Morresi
Contessa di Ceprano - Clara Foti

disc two

ACT TWO

1. Ella mi fu rapita (5:13)
2. Duca, duca (2:31)
3. Possente amor mi chiama (2:07)
4. Povero Rigoletto (3:39)
5. Cortigiani, vil razza dannata (4:15)
6. Mio padre... Tutte le feste al tempio (9:02)
7. Schiudete, ire al carcere (3:10)
8. E l'ami (2:17)
9. La donna e mobile (3:18)
10. Un di, se bel rammentomi (1:43)
11. Bella figlia dell'amore (4:51)
12. Venti scudi hai tu detto (4:48)
13. Ah, piu non ragiono (5:56)
14. Della vendetta alfin giunge l'istante (6:42)
15. V'ho ingannato, colpevole fui (4:16)

Maggio Musicale Fiorentino
conducted by Gianandrea Gavazzeni

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph of Ettore Bastianini as Rigoletto at La Scala, Milan

Recorded 2-7 and 9-10 July 1960 by Mercury, Teatro della Pergola, Florence, Italy

Total duration: 1hr 59:23

CD1: 55:35

CD2: 63:48

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