

Rossini

Il barbiere de Siviglia

Pristine
XR

"We go to *Il barbiere* for refreshment. Here the choice of conductor was as happy as it was unexpected. The veteran Serafin and man-of-the-moment Giulini were the obvious choices, but already critics and public were complaining about the predictability of cast-lists in this wonderful new age of complete operatic recordings. Alceo Galliera had attracted attention as a symphonic conductor and an orchestral trainer of exceptional ability. Walter Legge had picked him out for some early recordings with the Philharmonia Orchestra, including a sparkling performance of the Overture from *Il barbiere*. To the opera itself he brought a light touch, imaginative care for detail and a nice Rossinian feeling of expectancy, of fun brooding in alleyways and lights turned on in corners. It is, of course, an ensemble opera, the whole amounting to much more than the sum of its parts. The famous Rossini *crescendo* is the embodiment of laughter welling up from all points of the compass. It is as important, for instance, that the "stars" work together in the "Buona sera" quintet as that Figaro should make a success of his "Largo al factotum"; and, however brilliant Rosina's "Una voce poco fu", the general joy of the evening depends more upon the success of the Act I finale. Here, each of the principals makes a special contribution (mostly through an individuality of timbre), but each also draws from the centre (that is, the conductor and, I think, the record producer) a sense of a specialness of occasion, almost of history, that Legge was able to impart to every individual session.

All three principal singers need grace and agility, with the tenor's role widely regarded as of the greatest technical difficulty. The Act 2 aria "Cessa di piu resistere" has until recently been almost always omitted and, on account of this omission and a number of other cuts, it would be impossible to recommend this as the essential version. But I see no reason to suppose Alva could not have made as good a job of it as his successors have done: he was singing with the most delightful purity of tone and definition of line, and both serenades are sung with elegance. The lingering *diminuendi* of "Se ii mio nome" is in the best tradition of his famous predecessor Tito Schipa.

Of Callas it was said by Walter Legge that comedy failed to brush her with its wings. He wrote with the authority of experience, but the unprejudiced ear does not support such a conclusion. The two complete sets - *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *Il Turco in Italia* - are sung with a smile which becomes radiantly visible if one can add the memory of sparkling eyes and brilliant teeth as shown in video recordings of concert performances. Of course we listen prepared to flinch before every high note. The accursed flap lurks ahead ready to shake, rattle and roll every dominant-tonic finale, yet almost always we find on returning to such moments that the internal vocal caricaturist has been at work, distorting and exaggerating. The wry humour of "Dunque io son" is much to her liking and in this (as in much else) she is the mistress of humorous timing. Otherwise much is done simply by individuality of timbre, the familiar thrill of recognising the irreplaceable voice.

And the same is true of Gobbi: his voice still had an exceptional richness of colouration, especially in the middle register and at moderate volume. Sometimes the vibrations would flatten out, but the savour was never lost for long; always he was Gobbi and once you had caught a love for the voice it was not something you would drop for a coarsened note or two. Doctors Basilio and Bartolo are also richly cast."

John Steane, *Gramophone*, May 2011



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il barbiere di siviglia

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO 191

CAST

Rosina - Maria Callas
Il conte d'Almaviva - Luigi Alva
Figaro - Tito Gobbi
Bartolo - Fritz Ollendorff
Basilio - Nicola Zaccaria
Berta - Gabriella Carturan
Fiorello - Mario Carlin
Blume - Lore Wissmann

Philharmonia Orchestra & Chorus
conducted by Alceo Galliera
chorus-master Roberto Benaglio

Recorded 7-14 February 1957
Kingsway Hall, London

XR Remastered by Andrew Rose
EMI Producer: Walter Legge
EMI Sound Engineer: Robert Gooch

Total duration: 2hr 9:58

PRISTINE
AUDIO

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disc one (59:44)

1. Overture (6:41)

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

2. Piano, pianissimo, senza parlar (2:55)
3. Ecco ridente in cielo (4:10)
4. Ehi, Fiorello? (1:05)
5. Mille grazie, mio signore (1:56)
6. Gente indiscreta! (0:33)
7. La ran la le ra, la ran la la (4:41)
8. Ah, che bella vita! (3:44)
9. Se il mio nome saper voi bramate (2:55)
10. Oh, cielo! (1:00)
11. All'idea di quel metallo (3:07)
12. Piano, piano (1:59)
13. Oh, il meglio (1:38)
14. Ah, che d'amore la fiamma (1:23)

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

15. Una voce poco fa (6:17)
16. Sì, sì, la vincerò (4:04)
17. La calunnia è un venticello (3:38)
18. Ah! Che ne dite? (2:52)
19. Dunque io son (2:54)
20. Fortunati affetti miei (2:13)

disc two (70:04)

1. Ora mi sento meglio (1:23)
2. A un dottor della mia sorte (4:54)
3. Finora in questa camera (0:28)
4. Ehi, di casa, buona gente (5:17)
5. Dunque, lei vuol battaglia? (3:13)
6. Che cosa accadde, signori miei (2:17)
7. Fermi tutti, nessun si muova (1:23)
8. Fredda ed immobile (3:02)
9. Ma signor ... ma un dottor (4:43)

ACT TWO

10. Ma vedi il mio destino! (0:45)
11. Pace e gioia sia con voi (2:27)
12. Insomma, mio signore, chi è lei? (2:19)
13. Venite, signorina (0:43)
14. Contro un cor che accende amore (5:55)
15. Bella voce! Bravissima! (0:36)
16. Quando mi sei vicina (0:50)
17. Bravo, signore barbiere, ma bravo! (2:49)
18. Don Basilio! ... Cosa veggo! (4:01)
19. Buona sera, mio signore (2:01)
20. Orsu, signor Don Bartolo (3:15)
21. Che vecchio sospettoso! (0:29)
22. Il vecchiotto cerca moglie (3:20)
23. Temporale (2:49)
24. Alfine eccoci qua (1:02)
25. Ah, qual colpo inaspettato (5:46)
26. Ah, disgraziati noi! (2:15)
27. Zitti, zitti, piano, piano (2:05)