

It is fascinating to look back at the first review of what is generally acknowledged today as one of the great *Turandot* recordings. In writing these notes I had expected to bring you extensive quotes from *The Gramophone's* ecstatic review of September 1958. But instead what do I find? Something of an evisceration:

"The timbre [of Callas] is sometimes hollow and plummy in the easier positions; the emission is wavering and sounds both strained and ill supported in the upper reaches; and her *Turandot* is here, to my ear, totally unsatisfying – no matter how often elsewhere I may applaud this and that stroke of dramatic truth and imagination.

"Next, what about Mme Schwarzkopf? I hear this German Liu with gratitude – and I find her final song before her suicide, "Thou who art girt in ice", most moving and beautiful, with a true legato and some lovely floated tone, perfectly supported. Sad therefore to report that she throws away her chance in the first song – the lovely *morendo* ending could so easily have been sostenuto, but goes wisping away in a ladylike gasp. This Liu sounds a bit out of it in an otherwise all Italianate cast..."

But this opinion seems to have been quickly discarded and forgotten by other critics, as opinions shifted to regard the recording as a classic. By 1979 the same magazine (albeit the pen of a different reviewer) writes, of an LP reissue:

"One thinks of this as Callas's *Turandot*, and so it is, with the start of "In questa reggia" bringing a sudden generation of electricity that has one gasping, but hearing this riveting performance afresh has brought it home too how much it is Serafin's *Turandot* as well. One might in principle feel that a more reticent manner was more faithful to the score, but Serafin has one on the edge of one's seat.

"I remember originally finding the obvious stylistic contrast between Schwarzkopf and the other singers rather obtrusive, and some may still find it so, but what I note now are such heavenly moments as the end of "Signore ascolta" when the control of tone and legato in the rising octaves in the codetta is ravishing, ending with an immaculate *mesa di voce*. This too is a classic performance, finely contrasted with that of the princess."

And the revisions get better – more recently, again from Gramophone, now online:

"To have Callas, the most flashing-eyed of all sopranos as *Turandot*, is—on record at least—the most natural piece of casting. Other sopranos may be comparably icy in their command, but Callas with her totally distinctive tonal range was able to give the fullest possible characterization. With her *Turandot* was not just an implacable man-hater but a highly provocative female. One quickly reads something of Callas's own underlying vulnerability into such a portrait, its tensions, the element of brittleness. Equally in the final arioso of Alfano's completion, "Del primo pianto", the chesty way she sings "Straniero" in the opening phrase, addressing Calaf, is unforgettable in its continuing threat. With her the character seems so much more believably complex than with others.

It was sad that, except at the very beginning of her career, she felt unable to sing the role in the opera house, but this 1957 recording is far more valuable than any memory of the past, for me one of the most thrillingly magnetic of all her recorded performances, the more so when Schwarzkopf as Liu provides a comparably characterful and distinctive portrait, far more than a Puccinian 'little woman', sweet and wilting. Even more than usual one regrets that the confrontation between princess and slave is so brief. Though for some Schwarzkopf's observance of markings in Liu's two arias may seem to meticulous, the extra detail reinforces the fine-spun Straussian quality, notably in the rising and falling octaves of "Signore ascolta".

This XR remastering of what is today acknowledged as one of the great recordings of *Turandot* helps lift a sonic veil from the original recording – in all of its subsequent reissues – as well as providing a sense of space and dimension to the staging that is particularly welcome in the ensemble and chorus sections. It is tragic that still Walter Legge was resisting stereo recording at La Scala in 1957 – Ambient Stereo processing can only go so far in this respect – but nevertheless I hope you'll find a considerable improvement here over previous issues.

Andrew Rose



disc one
(76:58)

ACT ONE

1. Popolo di Pekino! (4:20)
2. Perduta la battaglia (1:11)
3. Gira la cote, gira, gira! (2:34)
4. Perch (4:54)
5. O giovinetto! (5:07)
6. Figlio, che fai? (3:48)
7. Silenzio! (4:08)
8. Signore, ascolta! (2:25)
9. Non piangere, Li (2:16)
10. Ah! per l'ultima volta! (2:28)

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

11. O! (3:31)
12. Ho una casa nell'Honan (3:16)
13. O mondo, pieno di pazzi innamorati! (4:14)
14. Uditte trombe! Altro che pace! (4:33)

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

15. Un giuramento atroce mi costringe (4:34)
16. Popolo di Pekino! (1:45)
17. In questa Reggia (2:50)
18. O Principi, che a lunghe caravane (3:29)
19. Straniero, ascolta! (4:46)
20. Gelo che ti d (3:24)
21. Figlio del cielo! (2:54)
22. Tre engmi m'hai proposto (4:31)

disc two
(41:02)

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

1. Così comanda Turandot (3:20)
2. Nessun dorma! (2:53)
3. Tu che guardi le stelle (3:48)
4. Principessa divina (2:44)
5. Quel nome! (2:18)
6. Tanto amore segreto (2:21)
7. Tu che di gel sei cinta (3:07)
8. Li (5:22)
9. Principessa di morte! (3:40)
10. O mio fio mattutino (8:03)

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

11. Diecimila anni al nostro Imperatore! (3:25)

CAST

La principessa Turandot - Maria Callas (*soprano*)
L'imperatore Altoum - Giuseppe Nessi (*tenor*)
Timur - Nicola Zaccaria (*bass*)
Il principe ignoto (Calaf) - Eugenio Fernandi (*tenor*)
Liù - Elisabeth Schwarzkopf (*soprano*)
Ping - Mario Borriello (*tenor*)
Pang - Renato Ercolani (*tenor*)
Pong - Piero de Palma (*tenor*)
Un mandarino - Giulio Mauri (*bass*)
Il principino di Persia - Piero de Palma (*tenor*)
Prima voce - Elisabetta Fusco (*soprano*)
Seconda voce - Pinuccia Perotti (*soprano*)

Orchestra e Coro del Teatro alla Scala, Milano
conducted by Tullio Serafin
chorus master: Norberto Mola

Libretto by Adami and Simoni, based on Friedrich Schiller's adaptation of the play Turandot by Carlo Gozzi
Recorded 9-13, 15 July 1957, Teatro alla Scala, Milan

Ambient Stereo XR remastering by: Andrew Rose
Front cover artwork: Maria Callas & Elisabeth Schwarzkopf at La Scala, Milan
Internal artwork: 1. Eugenio Fernandi & 2. Tullio Serafin

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