

"While awaiting the discs of *Medea* for review I spent an interesting time in looking up references to the opera and to Cherubini. He was, as is well known, held in the utmost reverence in Europe. Beethoven considered him the greatest dramatic composer of his time, Haydn called him the greatest living composer, but I did not know that Brahms thought that in *Medea* Cherubini had reached the highest point in dramatic music or that Puccini had declared the opera to be "a real masterpiece". Elsewhere one discovers varying opinions, among them that the composer's operas are now museum pieces. He is not mentioned at all in the revised edition of Kobbel. Now one of the very few things that really enthralled me at school was the study of Greek and of Euripides in particular: and remembering how thrilled I was with his *Medea* I wondered how Cherubini's music would mate with the libretto founded on the play.

The blazing intensity of the Overture knocked me off my patronising perch. Here was a foretaste of the feverish activity of the woman who became a living curse to humanity, a torment to herself and others, ceaselessly and remorselessly plotting and leaving only wreckage behind her. Tullio Serafin has a firm grasp of the grand classic style and proportions of the opera and I was, for most of the time, held spellbound by it. There are conventionalities, of course—as, for example, at the end of some of the arias—but there is a wealth of invention in the vocal and instrumental writing and a steady drive forward to the ultimate and appalling tragedy.

The Introductions to Acts 2 and 3 are very fine, the first full of suspense, the second a vivid picture of a sultry night, with a great storm breaking out. One learns with surprise from Harold Lawrence's excellent essay, which precedes the Italian-English libretto, that Cherubini uses no trumpets, no extra percussion and that the single trombone is used only to reinforce the off-stage wind band. With these restricted forces he certainly does evoke "sounds of great majesty and power" as well as of great beauty...

My score of the opera bears a motto from the *Médée* of Corneille, "Moi, dis-je, et c'est assez": this is echoed in the libretto in the word "Io son Medea". Callas is indeed Medea, and that is enough: it could not be more. From the moment she discloses herself to her faithless husband, his bride to be and her father, to her tremendous cry at the end of the opera, "I go now to the Styx, the sacred river, there will my shade await you", this great singer runs through the gamut of human emotions; love and tenderness, hate and scorn, rage and anguish, cruelty and hypocrisy; a princess and a magician who, in spite of her revolting crimes, gains our unwilling sympathy. Only a great character could hate and murder on this scale. And so in *Medea*'s superb arias (in which the orchestral parts are of great originality), in her recitatives, in her duet with Jason (in which the 'cellos play so remarkable a part in creating a sinister atmosphere), at all points, Callas gives the finest performance I have ever heard from her. At one or two moments, as in the first act aria "Dei tuoi figli la madre" (You see the mother of your children), she cannot make us forget the cruelly trying nature of the vocal part, but her voice is in splendid order, her attack magnificent: and she gives us some spine-chilling moments when she glories in the horrible death, by poison which burns the flesh off the body, that she has brought to Glauce and Creon, or when she cries to the Black Furies to come to her aid as she determines to kill her children." - A. R., *The Gramophone*, March 1959 (excerpts)

Medea is unusual in the canon of studio opera recordings made by Maria Callas in that, although it was issued in the UK by EMI's Columbia imprint, the recording was actually made by Mercury Records for Dischi Ricordi in Italy. At times it leaves something to be desired from a technical perspective - the balance between an unusually dry orchestral sound and the voices isn't always as good as one might wish for, for example, and the tonal balance is a little thin. I've done what I can to ameliorate as many of these shortcomings as possible with the aim of producing a more enjoyable listening experience, and in this I think the exercise has been largely successful. It is of course a stereo recording, which is sadly all too rare in the 1950s Callas catalogue - one of the benefits of Mercury undertaking the location recording rather than EMI, whose release - in the era of stereo LPs - was originally mono only!

Andrew Rose



disc one
(50:22)

1. Sinfonia (6:54)
- ACT ONE
2. Che? Quando già corona Amor (6:48)
3. O Amore, vieni a me! (5:07)
4. No, non temer (2:06)
5. O bella Glauce (2:29)
6. Colco! Pensier fatal! (1:52)
7. Or che più non vedrò (2:34)
8. Ah, già troppo turbò (0:33)
9. Pronube dive (3:52)
10. Signor! Ferma una donna (4:10)
11. Qui tremar devi tu (2:15)
12. Taci, Giason (2:26)
13. Dei tuoi figli la madre (4:26)
14. Son vane qui minacce (0:31)
15. Nemici senza cor (4:20)

disc two
(67:45)

- ACT TWO
1. Introduzione (2:04)
2. Soffrir non posso (2:39)
3. Date almen per pietà (9:50)
4. Medea, o Medea! (1:19)
5. Solo un pianto con te versare (6:30)
6. Creonte a me solo un giorno dà? (2:26)
7. Figli miei, miei ascolto (6:24)
8. Hai dato pronto ascolto (1:24)
9. Ah! Triste canto! ... Dio dell' Amor! (8:45)
- ACT THREE
10. Introduzione (4:25)
11. Numi, venite a me (4:53)
12. Del fiero duol che il cor mi frange (4:09)
13. Neris, che hai fatto (1:45)
14. E che? Io son Medea! (11:14)

PRISTINE
AUDIO

PACO 206

CAST

Medea - Maria Callas
 Glauce - Renata Scotto
 Neris - Miriam Pirazzini
 Giasone - Mirtò Picchi
 Creonte - Giuseppe Modesti
 Prima ancella - Lidia Morimpietri
 Seconda ancella - Elvira Galassi
 Capo delle guardie - Alfredo Giacomotti

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

Libretto by François Benoît Hoffman
 Italian translation by Carlo Zangarini
 Recorded 12-19 September 1957,
 Teatro alla Scala, Milan

Stereo XR remastering by: Andrew Rose
 Cover artwork: Maria Callas as Medea

Total duration: 1hr 58:08

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