

Donizetti heard Bellini's *I Puritani* eclipsing his own new opera, *Marino Faliero*, at the Théâtre-Italien—and went away and wrote *Lucia*. That crude way of putting it reveals an essential truth. *I Puritani*, though not based on Scott (whatever the reference books may say), borrowed the title under which *Old Mortality* was translated, and its plot belonged to the world of the Romantic novel. In this field Donizetti was superior. In both operas there is an opening scene with a chorus of retainers and a lyrical aria for a dramatic baritone; a heroine who goes mad for love, and imagines her wedding day in an elaborate Mad Scene; a bass who announces her arrival; a romantic tenor who must be both tender and heroic; an *uragano*, or violent storm. Donizetti even took one of Bellini's melodies (the bass line of the first-act duet) and improved on it (as the chorus' B major tune in the last scene of *Lucia*).

I do not want to praise *Lucia* at the expense of *I Puritani* (a very beautiful opera), but lately a certain amount of the opposite has been going on. Twenty-five years ago the old Italian operas generally were held in low esteem; more recently, the conventional thing to say is that Bellini is all right — because of his melodic gift. But to anyone who has a feeling for *opera*, as opposed to just *music*, it is plain that *Lucia* exists in a different world from *I Puritani* (despite the inspired pages of the latter). And one reason is that its characters are real people finding utterance in song — characters in situations imagined by a great artist, not concoctions by a minor librettist.

The heroine remains close to Scott's Miss Lucy; and she, you remember, "though the expression of the countenance was in the last degree gentle, soft, timid, and feminine", yet "nourished the germ of those passions which sometimes spring up in one night, like the gourd of the prophet, and astonish the observer by their unexpected ardour and intensity". No more than Amina is she just a sweet, simple coloratura. It is the great dramatic truth of Maria Callas's *Lucia*, in this new recording, which sets it above the impersonation of the earlier Columbia set. (Roberta Peters seems to me to be hardly a starter in the "great *Lucia*" stakes, but merely efficient, so I shall not consider the R.C.A. set in any detail in this review.) The Whitsun weekend has been spent playing again and again, in endless comparisons and to different groups of people, the new and old Callas recordings, the R.C.A., and Joan Sutherland's version of the two arias. The conclusion is that in every way Mme Callas has refined her interpretation of the role, and made it more exquisite, more fascinating, musically and dramatically more subtle — in a word, more beautiful. But do not think that this means the line has been overloaded with emotional colourings or self-consciously artistic "effects". Sometimes she has achieved her result by simplification. For example, in "Verrano a te" she no longer presses, but spins a tender thread of legato: this duet is melting, with Tagliavini at his most dulcet; the final verse in octaves is ravishing. (The brief cadenza in which the soprano from the high C, the tenor from the high E flat (!), run down in sixths, is as usual omitted: is it ever sung?). And "Alfin sei mio" is no longer broken by a gulp. Indeed Mme Callas could be said to have made her *Lucia* greater by reducing the overt dramatics, by bringing new tenderness, fragrance and innocence to her interpretation, and thereby actually increasing its expressive power.

The sound of the voice is very different from seven years ago. There is less weight behind it; it is more supple, more delicate. The timbre is not so dark, more tender and less resonated. I grant at once that there is more confidence, more forthrightness, in the earlier performance; and that in the cabaletta, "Quando rapita in estasi", the high D and, especially, the high C, of the final decorations are awkward, and may touch a nerve of pain in the listener. But on the whole the singing represents Callas at technically her best. There is just one sour note, the high C mentioned above; and very little of the unsteadiness, and moments of curdled tone, that spoil, for example, parts of the *La Sonnambula* recording. For some reason, each time the trill on the D sharp in "Regnava" (but not the other trills) is insecure. But that the singing as a whole is more beautiful than in the earlier set there can be no doubt.

- A. P., *The Gramophone*, July 1960 (excerpt)



PACO 207

donizetti

lucia di lammermoor

maria callas
ferruccio tagliavini
piero cappuccilli
margreta elkins
bernard ladysz
leonard del ferro
renzo casellato

philharmonia orchestra
and chorus

conducted by
tullio Serafin

stereo studio recording, 1959

Pristine
XR

disc one
(54:42)

1. Preludio (2:33)
- ACT ONE, SCENE ONE
2. Percorrete . . . Percorriamo le spiagge vicine (2:26)
3. Tu sei turbato! . . . E n'ho ben d'onde (3:00)
4. Cruda, funesta smania (2:10)
5. Il tuo dubbio è amai certezza . . .
Come vinti da stanchezza (2:19)
6. La pietade in suo favore (1:42)

- ACT ONE, SCENE TWO
7. Ancor non giunse? (4:01)
8. Regnava nel silenzio alta la notte e bruna (4:05)
9. Quando rapito in estasi (3:58)
10. Egli s'avanza . . . Lucia perdona se ad ora inusitata (2:29)
11. Sulla tomba che rinserra il tradito genitore (3:00)
12. Qui di sposa eternal fede . . .
Ah, soltanto il nostro foco (2:35)
13. Verranno a te sull'aure i miei sospiri ardenti (4:38)

- ACT TWO, SCENE ONE
14. Lucia fra poco a te verrà . . . Tremante l'aspetto (3:11)
15. Appressati, Lucia . . . Il pallor funesto, orrendo (5:19)
16. Soffriva nel pianto . . . Un folle t'accese (3:39)
17. Che fia? . . . Suonar di giubilo (1:34)
18. Se tradirmi tu potrai . . . Tu che vedi il pianto mio (2:03)

disc two
(56:08)

- ACT TWO, SCENE TWO
1. Per te d'immenso giubilo . . . Per poco fra le tenebre (3:24)
2. Dov'è Lucia? . . . Qui giungere or la vedrem (4:02)
3. Chi me frena in tal momento (3:35)
4. T'allontana, sciagurato . . . Rispettate in me di Dio (1:13)
5. Sconsigliato! In queste porte chi ti guida? (2:01)
6. Esci, fuggi, il furor che mi accende (1:22)

- ACT THREE, SCENE ONE
7. D'immenso giubilo s'innalzi un grido (2:23)
8. Dalle stanze ove Lucia tratta avea col suo consorte (2:25)
9. Oh! Qual funesto avvenimento! (3:14)
10. Il dolce suono mi colpi di sua voce! (6:45)
11. Ardon gli incensi (5:04)
12. Spargi d'amaro pianto (4:08)

- ACT THREE, SCENE TWO
13. Tombe degli avi miei (4:00)
14. Fra poco a me ricovero darà negletto avello (3:05)
15. Oh, meschina! Oh, fato orrendo! (4:24)
16. Tu che a Dio spiegasti l'ali (5:03)

PRISTINE
AUDIO

PACO 207

CAST

Lucia - Maria Callas
Edgardo - Ferruccio Tagliavini
Enrico - Piero Cappuccilli
Raimondo - Bernard Ladysz
Arturo - Leonard del Ferro
Alisa - Margreta Elkins
Normanno - Renzo Casellato

Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus
conducted by Tullio Serafin
chorus master: Roberto Benaglio

Libretto by Salvatore Cammarano after Walter Scott
Recorded 16-21 March 1959, Kingsway Hall, London

Stereo XR remastering by: Andrew Rose
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