

Can any reader help me towards the remainder of the Victorian poem which contains the line “She found *La Gioconda* was rather beyond ‘er’? Not of course that Mme Callas finds any such thing: *au contraire*. I simply cannot imagine anyone getting more out of the role than she does this time—not that sounding “gioconda” (i.e. “joyous”) is quite her forte. But just listen to the passage at the close of side 4 beginning “O mia madre” and ending “per lui . . . per lui”, etc. “Pure” singing? By no means. Indeed there is much con- striction and at least one heavily beating climax. And yet the total effect is “riveting”—to use a hackneyed adjective to describe the effect of rather banal music suddenly being burned afresh onto one’s imagination. Compare this same passage with the Cetra version reviewed two years ago; same singer, same conductor. Both make an infinitely more artistic effect now. It could epitomise the whole recording. Of course you may say that artistry is not the prime consideration here; beef *à la* Barbieri (the rival Laura in the earlier set) is what most *Gioconda* fans today insist on. But it cannot always have been so. Generations of bel canto singers lavished their art on this superlative old Grand Opera. Obviously it still has a public of kinds. Since in an access of unwonted goodwill I gave the old Decca set under Gavazzeni the big hello, I have been assailed by doubts and wake in the night thinking I have heard an accusing voice say “You didn’t half start something...”. Well, there they are: not one, but *three* versions to choose from, with my blessing now lighting (as Gioconda’s blind mother would say) on this latest.

Callas apart, if such an idea is possible, the cast itself is commendable. As Laura and her husband we have the real life couple Cossotto and Vinco, thoughtful, stylish and anxious to match the heroine in artistic aim. It is well worth comparing the mezzos in that ladies’ battle on board ship; the duet, “I saw him first”, or words to that effect, which can sometimes produce such an absurd and hilarious effect of “Anything you can do, I can do louder”. In the new set, Callas and Cossotto make it sound actually dignified. Whereas trying to “out ham” Barbieri in the earlier version, Callas resorted to rather vulgar singing. Ferraro is a little disappointing. My preference is di Stefano (with Milanov and Warren on the Previtali set listed above). Mr. Ferraro is, in my view, much preferable to del Monaco or Poggi, but even he cannot apparently refrain from bawling the end of “Cielo e mar” and finishes really brutally—with a stupendous yell. Strange that when Mme Callas is spending so much art on her bits, that the leading man is not coaxed into thinking along the same lines. The baritone, Cappuccilli, is an acceptable Barnaba; but hasn’t the villainy in the voice or the rueful, rhythmic glee of Bastianini or the late Leonard Warren. I find this role a little subservient sounding; it is, or should be one of the leading, if not *the* leading male part.

The sound is excellent—bells, distant voices, ironical off-stage revelry are beautifully calculated. But it is as a portrait of Mme Callas’s voice (blemishes and all) and a souvenir of her exceptional dramatic gift that the new set will most commend itself. The stereo version, announced for release on SAX2359-61, is not yet to hand.

P.H.-W., *The Gramophone*, October 1960



ponchielli

la gioconda

disc one (52:23)

ACT 1

1. Preludio (5:01)
2. Feste e pane! (2:54)
3. E cantan su lor tombe! (2:03)
4. Figlia, che reggi Il tremulo piè (3:24)
5. L'ora non giunse ancor del vespro santo (2:53)
6. Polso di cerro! (3:18)
7. Suo covo è un tugurio (3:20)

disc two (37:32)

ACT 2

1. Ho! He! Ho! He! Fissa Il timone! (4:07)
2. Pescator, affonda l'esca (1:35)
3. Pescator, affonda l'esca (2:34)
4. Sia gloria ai canti dei naviganti! (4:21)
5. Cielo e mar! (4:27)
6. Ma chi vien? (4:31)
7. Laggiù nelle nebbie remote (2:44)

8. Che? La plebe or qui si arroga (4:13)
9. Voce di donna o d'angelo (5:06)
10. Enzo Grimaldo, Principe di Santafor, che pensi? (3:07)
11. O grido di quest'anima (2:46)
12. Maledici? Sta ben ... l'amor t'accieca (2:07)
13. O monumento! (3:49)
14. Carneval! Baccanal! (2:24)
15. Angele Dei (6:00)

8. E il tuo nocchiere or la fuga t'appresta (0:42)
9. Stella del marinar! (2:11)
10. E un anatema! (0:36)
11. Là attesi e il tempo colsi (1:13)
12. L'amo come il fulgor del creato! (2:03)
13. Il mio braccio t'afferra! (1:38)
14. Maledizion! Ha preso il vol! (1:42)
15. Vedi là, nel canal morto (3:07)

ponchielli

la gioconda

CAST

La Gioconda - Maria Callas
Laura Adorno - Fiorenza Cossotto
La Cieca - Irene Companeez
Alvise Badoero - Ivo Vinco
Enzo Grimaldo - Pier Miranda Ferraro
Barnaba - Piero Cappuccilli
Zuane - Leonardo Monreale
Cantore/Pilota - Carlo Forti
Isepo/Prima voce lontana - Renato Ercolani
Seconda voce lontana - Aldo Biffi
Un barnabotto - Bonaldo Giaiotti

Chorus and Orchestra of La Scala, Milan
conducted by Antonino Votto
chorus master: Norberto Mola

Libretto by Arrigo Boito
Recorded 4-11 September 1959, Teatro alla Scala, Milan

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

Total duration: 2hr 46:10



ponchielli

la gioconda

disc three (76:16)

ACT 3

1. Si morir ella de'! (2:37)
2. Ombre di mia prosapia (2:27)
3. Qui chiamata m'avete? Bella così, madonna (3:12)
4. Morir! è troppo orribile! (2:51)
5. La gaia canzone (3:22)
6. O madre mia, nell'isola fatale (2:06)
7. Benvenuti messeri! Andrea Sagredo! (4:00)
8. Grazie vi rendo per le vostre laudi (1:31)
9. Prodigio! Incanto! (9:39)
10. Vieni! ... Lasciami! (3:20)
11. Già ti veggio immota e smorta (5:21)

ACT 4

12. Nessun v'ha visto? (5:42)
13. Suicidio! (4:13)
14. Ecco, il velen di Laura (5:18)
15. Ridarti il sol, la vita! (2:51)
16. O furibonda jena (2:38)
17. Ten va serenata (1:07)
18. La barca s'avvicina (2:02)
19. Quest'ultimo bacio che il pianto (5:00)
20. Ora posso morir. Tutto è compiuto (3:53)