

"On balance, too, I should choose the new Columbia *Norma* in preference to the same company's still available 1954 set which also has Callas and Serafin with the Scala chorus and orchestra. The recording is far better, and so are the men: Corelli gives us a likeable Pollione more than a little reminiscent of Lauri-Volpi, and Zaccaria contributes a sound, if not very distinguished, High Priest. Though I always long to hear a lyrical soprano as Adalgisa, I greatly took to Christa Ludwig's performance, which was thoroughly Italian (in the good sense of that adjective), with shapely phrasing and firm attack.

Of course, Callas herself is the heart of the matter, and I do not see how it can be denied that her vocal (as opposed to interpretative) powers show here a certain decline. For a long time her sustained upper notes have *resembled* a slow trill; now they often *are* that. From countless examples I select one, the high A flat at the end of the first recitative, just before "Casta Diva". If someone were to put the stylus down, without previous warning or explanation, on this note, and if we did not at once recognise the timbre, we should conclude that (perhaps for demonstration purposes) as part of a singing lesson, someone was executing a shake at an unusually slow rate. Much the same thing happens to almost every long-held note above the stave, and often to E's and F's also.

Below, the tone is usually veiled, seldom beautiful or pure in the abstract, but often fascinating in context. Though I cannot help wilting under those huge high tremolos, I come in the end to admire and almost to love the lower regions of Mme Callas's voice because of the incomparable art, now richer than ever, with which it is deployed. There are refinements and subtleties (for instance, the sudden *piano* on the phrase "pei tuoi figli" in Norma's plea to Pollione) which come closer to the world of some great Lieder singer – a Gerhardt, even – than to that of Italian opera as we know it today. Of the same order is her exquisite fining-off and shading away at the end of many phrases and cadences: for instance, in the first two phrases of "Deh non volermi vittime" in the Finale, or in the "Mira, o Norma" duet with Adalgisa. This opening scene of Act 2 is indeed the high water mark, artistically, of the whole set."

"The Gramophone and the Voice" – Desmond Shawe-Taylor, *The Gramophone*, January 1962

Maria Callas recorded her first opera in Italy in September 1952. Eight years later she recorded an opera for the last time at La Scala, her career as a recording soloist in full-length works almost over. Two more recordings were to follow – both recorded in Paris in the mid-sixties with Georges Prêtre conducting – and were received with mixed reviews. (Her 1964 *Carmen* was liked by The Gramophone, her *Tosca* of 1965, the last Callas opera recording, was not.)

It seems incredible today that such a stellar career in the studio was so short-lived. But as the article quoted here suggests, her voice was starting to fail her, and despite her ever-greater artistry as a performing singer in opera, clearly her producers were ready to move on.

A golden age of opera recording, which had needed the new technology of long-playing records for its success, was reaching a curious place, one where instead of continuing to explore the operatic repertoire, artists like Callas were being asked to re-record in stereo works that they'd only recorded a very few years earlier in mono. Certainly the sound was better here in 1960 than it had been in 1954, but given the high expense of buying a set of LPs such as those of an opera that runs for at the time – the cost of the three long-playing discs, including sales taxes in the UK, was over £170 – nearly \$220US – in today's money.

Despite the great leap forward in sound quality, there is still room for improvement. I find some of the stereo positioning of the voices less than convincing, and alas right now I'm unable to do much about this, but the overall sound in this XR remaster is now much fuller and richer than in the original EMI, bringing a welcome added depth to the entire production.

Andrew Rose



disc one
(63:18)

1. Sinfonia (5:36)
- Act One, Scene One
2. Ite sul colle... dell'aura tua profetica (9:38)
3. Svanir le voci! (3:10)
4. Meco all'altar di Venere (2:56)
5. Odi?... I suoi riti a compiere (1:33)
6. Me protegge, me difende (1:38)
7. Norma viene (4:22)
8. Sediziose voci (4:31)
9. Casta Diva (7:00)
10. Fine al rito, e il sacro bosco (1:41)
11. Ah! bello a me ritorna (3:21)
12. Sgombra è la sacra selva (6:35)
13. Eccola - va, mi lascia (1:48)
14. Va, crudele (5:41)
15. Vieni in Roma (3:48)

disc two
(28:02)

- Act one, Scene two
1. Vanne, e li ceta entrambi (4:25)
2. Adalgisa! Alma, costanza (3:38)
3. Oh, rimembranza! (5:19)
4. Ah si, fa core, abbracciami (3:07)
5. Ma di' ... l'amato giovine (3:08)
6. Oh, di qual sei tu vittima (4:17)
7. Perfido! ... Or basti! (1:27)
8. Vanne, si, mi lascia, indegno (2:41)

For a full catalogue visit
www.pristineclassical.com
or call : (00) 33 967 391 857

© 2024 Pristine Audio

bellini

norma

CAST

Norma - Maria Callas
Adalgisa - Christa Ludwig
Pollione - Franco Corelli
Oroveso - Nicola Zaccaria
Clotilde - Edda Vincenzi
Flavio - Piero De Palma

Chorus and Orchestra of Teatro alla Scala, Milan
conducted by Tullio Serafin

Recorded 5-12 September 1960, Milan

Stereo XR remastering by: Andrew Rose
Cover artwork: Maria Callas in 1960

Total duration: 2hr 41:26



disc three
(70:06)

Act two, Scene one

1. Introduzione (3:47)
2. Dormono entrambi! (4:55)
3. Olà! Clotilde! (0:50)
4. Mi chiami, o Norma? (2:50)
5. Deh! con te, con te li prendi (4:28)
6. Mira, o Norma (4:16)
7. Cedi ... deh cedi! (1:09)
8. Sì, fino all'ore estreme (2:10)

Act two, Scene two

9. Non parti? (5:16)
10. Guerrieri! a voi venirne (1:56)
11. Ah! del Tebro al giogo indegno (3:03)

Act two, Scene two

12. Ei tornerà. Sì! (4:30)
13. Squila il bronzo del Dio! (1:22)
14. Guerra! guerra! (2:06)
15. Né compì il rito, o Norma? (4:06)
16. In mia man alfin tu sei (5:43)
17. Già mi pasco ne' tuoi sguardi (1:44)
18. Dammi quel ferro! (3:26)
19. Qual cor tradisti (5:04)
20. Norma! deh! Norma, scòlpatì! (2:40)
21. Deh! Non voleri vittime (4:44)

For a full catalogue visit
www.pristineclassical.com
or call : (00) 33 967 391 857

© 2024 Pristine Audio