

When this jolly old Grand Opera came to LP for the first time (except for an old Urania set) in Decca's excellent version, which I reviewed in February, I let my pen fly along under the memory of childish enjoyments and no doubt wrote at too great a length and with undue enthusiasm of the old war horse. (I was duly snubbed.) Nor did I imagine that so soon I should have to be hearing it all over and over again. May my friendly admiration for the fustian but instinctively dramatic old work be taken for granted?

The Cetra cast is impressive and offers strong competition to the Cerquetti, Simionato, Del Monaco, Bastianini set-up on Decca. This Cetra recording is, I think, a shade brighter and often a little brittle. But both sets have plenty of perspective and atmosphere and the Cetra the rather better chorus (not that that really matters). Gavazzeni took certain things, for instance "Suicidio!", rather more briskly than Votto, who is a "last-ouncer". Under some of the more terrific solos and duets I could have done with more orchestral texture, but that is partly true also of Decca. One notices it in that terrific ladies' slanging match on shipboard ("He's mine!" "No, he's mine, I saw him first!"), where it is rather fun incidentally to hear Barbieri, in terrific form, ten times beefier than Simionato, actually "take away" the duet from Maria Callas — who wouldn't often allow that to happen, I fancy. Simionato was a more delicate Laura than Barbieri, who hams it up a lot, though she sings "Stella marinar" affectingly. On the problem of Callas versus Cerquetti, I find I have to eat my words (honest, I hope), I said that I actually preferred Cerquetti's "Suicidio!" to Callas's, which at that time I knew only out of context on a 7-inch EP. In context, though plummy at the start and tremendously laboured, it is undeniably more exciting than Cerquetti's more rapid and firmer, less melodramatic version. In spite of some painful high notes and unevenness of effect, Callas's *Gioconda* is a marvellously vivid figure; everything is made memorable, convincing; everything is "dared" at its most exciting. I don't want to seem to be going back on Cerquetti, but an aria such as "Suicidio" as the climax to a growing interpretation can sound quite different and much more artistic than when cut from its context.

How the rest of the two casts match up is largely a matter of opinion. Poggi's attack, his accuti are unfailing. He sings very excitingly in the "Enzo Grimaldo" duet (Silveri, too, takes all his chances and is in good form, the equal of Bastianini). But Poggi cannot cope with "Cielo e mar", or at least the musing and delicate aspects of it. He hollers. But then so does Del Monaco. Siepi is slightly preferable to the late Giulio Neri. In the Dance of the Hours (side 5) you can easily compare the two conductors. Votto is the more lush, the more given to a "telling" rubato. Some of his ensembles on this side sound congested, and though this is a decent pressing, I had a little trouble with groove jumping and pre-echoes. But anyone contemplating a complete *Gioconda* should examine and perhaps select this one.

P.H.-W, *The Gramophone*, December 1958

(NB. The UK release of this recording came some 6 years after it was made, 5 years after its original Italian issue.)



disc one
(54:01)

ACT 1

1. Preludio (5:02)
2. Feste e pane! (2:55)
3. E cantan su lor tombe! (2:02)
4. Figlia, che reggi il tremulo piè (3:33)
5. L'ora non giunse ancor del vespro santo (2:54)
6. Polso di cerro! (3:42)
7. Suo covo è un tugurio (3:14)
8. Che? La plebe or qui si arroga (4:13)
9. Voce di donna o d'angelo (5:25)
10. Enzo Grimaldo, Principe di Santafior, che pensi? (2:59)
11. O grido di quest'anima (2:51)
12. Maledici? Sta ben ... l'amor t'accieca (2:16)
13. O monumento! (3:57)
14. Carneval! Baccanal! (2:30)
15. Angele Dei (6:28)

disc two
(36:49)

ACT 2

1. Ho! He! Ho! He! Fissa il timone! (4:01)
2. Pescator, affonda l'esca (1:27)
3. Pescator, affonda l'esca (2:35)
4. Sia gloria ai canti dei naviganti! (4:19)
5. Cielo e mar! (4:32)
6. Ma chi vien? (4:32)
7. Laggi nelle nebbie remote (2:26)
8. E il tuo nocchiere or la fuga t'appresta (0:43)
9. Stella del marinar! (2:11)
10. E un anatema! (0:34)
11. Là attesi e il tempo colsi (1:11)
12. L'amo come il fulgor del creato! (2:03)
13. Il mio braccio t'afferra! (1:35)
14. Maledizion! Ha preso il vol! (1:39)
15. Vedi là, nel canal morto (3:03)

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ponchielli

la gioconda

CAST

La Gioconda - Maria Callas

Enzo - Gianni Poggi

Barnaba - Paolo Silveri

Laura - Fedora Barbieri

Alvise - Giulio Neri

La Cieca - Maria Amadini

Zuàne - Piero Poldi

Isèpo - Armando Benzi

Un Pilota - Piero Poldi

Chorus and Orchestra of RAI, Torino
conducted by Antonino Votto

Recorded 6 - 10 September, 1952
Auditorium della RAI, Torino

Ambient Stereo XR remastering by: Andrew Rose
Cover artwork based on a photograph of Maria Callas

Total duration: 2hr 46:20



disc three
(75:29)

ACT 3

1. Si morir ella de'! (2:37)
2. Ombre di mia prosapia (2:26)
3. Qui chiamata m'avete? Bella così, madonna (3:14)
4. Morir! è troppo orribile! (2:57)
5. La gaia canzone (3:17)
6. O madre mia, nell'isola fatale (2:03)
7. Benvenuti messeri! Andrea Sagredo! (4:02)
8. Grazie vi rendo per le vostre laudi (1:33)
9. Prodigio! Incanto! (9:22)
10. Vieni! ... Lasciami! (3:12)
11. Già ti veggo immota e smorta (5:18)

ACT 4

12. Nessun v'ha visto? (5:27)
13. Suicidio! (4:37)
14. Ecco, il velen di Laura (5:04)
15. Ridarti il sol, la vita! (2:50)
16. O furibonda jena (2:42)
17. Ten va serenata (1:07)
18. La barca s'avvicina (2:00)
19. Quest'ultimo bacio che il pianto (4:47)
20. Ora posso morir. Tutto è compiuto (3:46)
21. Vo' farmi più gaia, più fulgida ancora (3:07)

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