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Die Entführung aus dem Serail (review)

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(Review)

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According to the notes, baritone Giovanni Guarino has done Rossini and Donizetti character parts all over Italy, and his experience shows. The Collegium Musicum (not a period-instrument ensemble) plays extremely well, and the live recording is (save for minor balance problems) quite enjoyable. Let us hope that *La buona figliuola* will soon surface in a good performance to remedy the neglect into which this worthy composer has fallen.

George Jellinek

N O T E S

1. Patrick J. Smith's *The Tenth Muse* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970) gives a generous account of Goldoni's activity and operatic significance.

2. The Teatro San Cassiano was Venice's first public opera house. It opened in 1637.

Die Entführung aus dem Serail. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Konstanze: Anneliese Rothenberger
Blonde: Renate Holm
Belmonte: Fritz Wunderlich
Pedrillo: Eugenio Valori
Ossin: Kurt Böhme

Pasha Selim: Victor Parlaghy
Orchestra and Chorus of Teatro Colón
Heinz Wallberg, conductor
Myto (distributed by Qualiton Imports)
 2 MCD 021.241 (2 CDs)

Fritz Wunderlich fans will want this previously unreleased live performance of 8 September 1961 at the Teatro Colón, dating some four years before the tenor's studio recording under Eugen Jochum for Deutsche Grammophon (and featuring one other member of this cast, Kurt Böhme). The sound on the Myto set is generally of excellent monaural broadcast quality, the orchestra clear and forward, instrumental timbres distinct, voices vividly miked, with virtually no distortion on high notes and only the occasional light fading of signal or (in the case of Blonde's first aria) minuscule tape break; "Martern aller Arten" alone is unfortunately marred by some light airwave hiss, but, given the consistently clean quality of the rest, one can tolerate it. The stage noise and audience laughter are unobtrusive, adding just the right atmosphere to the proceedings. Applause is retained, and the (conventionally trimmed) spoken dialogue is clearly recorded and delivered in a genuinely entertaining fashion, making this set a model of its kind; not long into listening, it becomes obvious that this is a live performance that merits preservation for the pleasure of not only Wunderlich fans but lovers of Mozart and fine singing in general. Heinz Wallberg's conducting is tautly paced but never rushed, allowing the singers enough freedom to savor their music and make it speak from the heart; the orchestra responds admirably.

Wunderlich, whose picture graces the booklet cover, is of course this set's main attraction, and the great Mozart tenor is captured here in absolutely top

form, which is to say, in achingly gorgeous voice. The roundness and warmth of his timbre, the elegance of his phrasing, the cleanness of his divisions, the shapeliness of his legato, the utter clarity of his diction, and the overall poetry of his interpretation are better captured here, I think, than in his comparatively prosaic reading on the stereo DG set. It is a pity that Belmonte's third-act aria ("Ich baue ganz") is omitted in the Buenos Aires performance; as was general practice at the time, the second act's "Wenn der Freude" is repositioned and sung in its place.¹ In the latter, Wunderlich is heard to sing an *appoggiatura*, nonexistent on the DG studio version. Other refinements heard here but not under Jochum's less flexible baton on the commercial set include some graceful rubati and *mezza voce* effects on certain phrases in "O wie ängstlich," and a lovely *messa di voce* on the long-held F (on "die We—lt") in the love duet.

Another valid reason to acquire this release is Böhme's delightful performance as Osmin. His short-tempered overseer here sounds genuinely vexed by the interloper Belmonte's questions in their first-act sparring duet, and the unbot-tled sarcasm he directs toward Pedrillo in "Solche hergelaufne Laffen" makes his ensuing tantrum ("Erst geköpft, dann gehangen") seem all the more inevitable. This Osmin is ultimately more endearing than menacing, and one can sense the audience's affection for him, even in "Ha! wie will ich triumphieren," where Böhme resorts to barking the lowest phrases up an octave when his voice won't obey in the heat of performance (he has problems here in the DG set, too, where his bass loses tonal body below the staff). Considering this limitation, not to mention the laughs and grunts with which he often "embellishes" his lines, Böhme's singing throughout remains remarkably artistic and rhythmically exemplary. Those familiar only with his unremittingly gruff approach on the DG set will be amazed at how much more rounded and musical an interpretation he gives under Wallberg.

Anneliese Rothenberger's Konstanze is a joy to hear, even if the upper stretches of her florid arias taxed her limpid soprano a certain degree on this particular occasion, and Renate Holm's Blonde is as ably and idiomatically sung as any on disc. Myto provides convenient tracking, keeping the musical numbers and spoken dialogue separate. The accompanying booklet provides the libretto in German (for the musical numbers only, not the dialogue) and an essay with some sketchy biographical information on the singers, of whom probably only the Pedrillo, the Polish emigrant Eugenio Valori, will be new to *Entführung* collectors.

Six bonus tracks at the end of the second CD allow us to hear the twenty-four-year-old Wunderlich in six songs by the medieval Swiss composer Ludwig Senfl (c.1490–1543). Alas, Myto's booklet essay offers no information about these selections other than to list incipits, the identities of the string-trio accompanists, and the date and city of the performance ("27.10.1954 Freiburg"). Thus, it would appear that these items were recorded during the young tenor's student days at the Freiburg Musikhochschule. The voice has not yet acquired the

burnished, sensual tone of the mature Wunderlich, but it is interesting to hear how gamely it negotiates the rather frequent descents below the staff.

E. Thomas Glasow

NOTE

1. "Ich baue ganz" is duly performed by Wunderlich on the complete 1965 DG studio *Entführung*.

Armida. Joseph Haydn

Armida: Cecilia Bartoli
Rinaldo: Christoph Prégardien
Zelmira: Patricia Petibon
Idreno: Oliver Widmer
Ubaldo: Scot Weir
Clotarco: Markus Schäfer

Concentus Musicus Wien
Nikolaus Harnoncourt, conductor
Live recording, Vienna, June 2000
Teldec (distributed by Atlantic)
 81108-2 (2 CDs)

Mezzo-sopranos have always invaded soprano territory, with varying degrees of success. Cecilia Bartoli's recent forays into the soprano repertory (both in the theater and on records) have been consistently interesting. Bartoli's Almirena, on the new Decca recording of Handel's *Rinaldo*, is a distinguished performance, thoughtfully conceived and executed with the utmost sensitivity and technical command. Coincidentally, Bartoli now portrays Almirena's arch-enemy, the sorceress Armida, in another opera based upon Tasso's epic *Gerusalemme liberata*.

Haydn's *Armida* (1784), the last of his stage works written for Prince Esterházy's household, was a success. Performed a total of fifty-four times at the Eszterháza Court Theater between 1784 and 1788, it was also heard during the composer's lifetime in Bratislava, Budapest, Vienna, and Turin. Then, after a long period of neglect, the opera received its first modern performances in 1968 (at first in concert form, in Cologne; then staged, in Berne). The libretto is a dramatically clumsy affair. As Teldec's introductory essay points out (booklet, p. 17), the Eszterháza opera productions, so extravagant in other respects, did not bother to employ a resident poet; and as a result Haydn was forced to rely on adaptations of older librettos.

Most operas based on the story of Armida and Rinaldo incorporate three key episodes taken directly from Tasso's poem: (1) Armida, about to assassinate the sleeping Rinaldo, realizes that she has fallen in love with him. (2) After Rinaldo has become Armida's "boy toy" (as we might put it today), his fellow Crusaders infiltrate Armida's enchanted bower, show Rinaldo his reflection in a magic shield, and thus shame him into agreeing to abandon Armida and return to them. (3) In a confrontation modeled on that between Dido and Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Armida begs Rinaldo not to leave her; she faints; he reluctantly