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Amor, Vida de Mi Vida (review)

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Amor, Vida de Mi Vida. DVD. Jesús Lopez-Cobos / Mozarteum Orchester Salzburg. With Plácido Domingo and Ana María Martínez. Medici Arts, 2009. 2072478. \$32.49.

This DVD is a live recording of works performed during two nights at the Salzburger Festspiele (Großes Festspielhaus) in August, 2007. Packaged as a collection of excerpts from zarzuelas, the performance features Plácido Domingo (tenor), Ana María Martínez (soprano), and the Mozarteum Orchester Salzburg under the baton of Jesús López-Cobos.

Born in Spain to parents who made a career in zarzuela performance, Plácido Domingo moved with his family as a child to Mexico, where his parents had formed a zarzuela company. The works on this recording reflect his family's heritage and business and are understandably sentimental. The repertory on the DVD is comprised of instrumental pieces, arias, and duets excerpted from twenty-one works, most of which are truly zarzuelas (The *jota* from Manuel de Falla's ballet *El sombrero de tres picos*, ¡Soledá!- *¿Me llamas, Rafaeliyo?* from Manuel Pennella's opera *El gato montés*, and "Lippen Schweigen" from Franz Léhár's operetta *Die lustige Witwe* are the outsiders.) All but two of the works (those by the Cuban composer, Ernesto Lecuona and the Austro-Hungarian, Léhár) on the DVD are from Spanish composers.

Despite the fact that the zarzuela as a genre has its roots in Baroque Spain, no early works are represented in this particular recording. Drawn strictly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the earliest work on the DVD is "Al pensar en el dueño de mis amores," from Ruperto Chapí's *Las hijas del Zebedeo* (1889), and the most recent work is "No puede ser" from Pablo Sorozábal's *La tabernera del puerto* (1936).

The concerts were nicely but conventionally filmed and the venue is pleasant, if a bit on the ordinary side. Domingo and Ana María Martínez sing with a subtle Castilian accent, and the orchestra performs masterfully with López-Cobos at the helm. During the pieces that feature the singers, the camera stays mainly on the Domingo and/or Martínez, alternating shots of the audience at appropriate moments. During the instrumental works there is more variety in the camera angles, with the focus zooming in on the instruments that were perceived to

be or particular importance in the moment. While interesting visually, this is acoustically unnerving, because when an instrument is featured, not only does the camera linger on the instrument/section, at the same time, the audio of that particular instrument is also momentarily amplified. This has the unfortunate side effect of throwing off the ensemble balance written into the composition.

Overall the DVD is an easy sell. All of the pieces selected are lushly scored, with a focus on melody, consistently dramatic, yet conservatively pleasant, harmonies, and a preponderance of dance rhythms. Additionally, the works have a common thread of "exotic" flair exhibited mainly by semistereotypical "folk" sounds (chromatic melodies, dance rhythms, and the use of castanets). Even the work by Lecuona is marked by recurring inclusion of Afro-Cuban percussion, and the Léhár is a waltz!

Watching the entire DVD in one sitting is perhaps not recommended as the works are all quite similar and saturation will come quickly. Waiting for the soloists to walk on and off the stage also becomes quite tedious when watching continuously. However, if you are looking for an excellent chapter or two of a video to introduce the zarzuela genre in a music appreciation course or some sort of event in which patrons with a love of music, but little music experience are being addressed, this video is ideal. The music is all extraordinarily approachable; there is no shortage of catchy melodies, toe-tapping dance rhythms, and several unmistakable references to the exotic (mostly) Spanish origins. The orchestra looks great, the close ups of the instrumentalists are wonderfully posed (one could even use the video to approach the subject of rotary valve trumpets!) and the close ups of the singers are at an appropriate angle so as to not be uncomfortable. Subtitles are available in German, English, French, and Spanish. This is definitely not a filmic production, but rather a television-style work, and for what it is, it delivers.

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