



Giuseppe VERDI (1813 - 1901)

Early Arias

see end of review for track listing

Lucia Aliberti (soprano)

Orchestra Sinfonica e Coro Sinfonico di Milano Giuseppe Verdi/Oleg Caetani

rec. July 2008, Auditorium, Milano

Sung texts but no translations enclosed.

CHALLENGE CLASSICS CC72589 [74:07]

The Sicilian soprano Lucia Aliberti is not only one of the most successful opera singers of her generation but she is also a composer and plays several instruments. She has specialised in the operas of Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi. Her Verdi roles include Luisa Miller, Gilda in *Rigoletto*, Violetta in *La traviata* and Maria in *Simon Boccanegra*. In the present programme she concentrates mostly on early Verdi operas. Many of these arias are relative rarities on disc and in the concert hall.

Mercé, dilette amiche from *I vespri Siciliani* is one of the better known examples - and not exactly 'early Verdi' - but I don't grumble when the singing is so assured. Some doubtful intonation apart this is splendid music-making. Her technique is beyond reproach and the tone is beautiful. With *I masnadieri*, based on an early drama by Schiller, she adopts Jenny Lind repertoire. The opera was a commission from Her Majesty's Theatre in London, where the Swedish diva was the main attraction. This is a beautiful aria and though one can detect a slight beat in the voice on long notes at this slow tempo it is an assured reading. The cabaletta is impressive with all the coloratura spotless. *Alzira* was not a success in Naples at the premiere and further productions in Rome and Milan were more or less write-offs. The aria has a memorable melody but as a whole it is rather empty. The cabaletta is almost comically florid.

Attila wasn't too well received by the critics but the audiences liked it and it was performed throughout Italy and also in Spain and Portugal. In the 1870s it disappeared and wasn't revived until 1951 at a concert performance under Giulini, which was also recorded. There are several good episodes and the soprano aria heard here is one of the best with a lot of florid fireworks in the cabaletta.

Aroldo is a re-working of the unsuccessful *Stiffelio*. At the premiere at Rimini there were 27 curtain calls for the composer. It was seen in many Italian houses during the following years. Nowadays it is a rarity, since the rediscovery of *Stiffelio*.

I Lombardi was well received at the premiere and one reviewer wrote: 'If *Nabucco* created this young man's reputation *I Lombardi* served to confirm it'. Overall *I Lombardi* is a much more uneven work than the predecessor but there are wonderful moments and this aria is one of them. Lucia Aliberti's soft singing here is truly beguiling.

About *Giovanna d'Arco* few scholars have had anything positive to say, even though it was enthusiastically received by the premiere audience. Gabriele Baldini mentions one or two numbers with some merits. One of them is Giovanna's cavatina from the prologue, which is the one Luisa Aliberti has chosen. Having listened to Montserrat Caballé's recording shortly before I listened to Aliberti I missed the creamy tones of the Spanish soprano. Aliberti's tone sometimes spreads and becomes unsteady but a lot is good.

Un giorno di regno was Verdi's second opera and this comedy was a terrible fiasco. This is scarcely

surprising when we know that the 26-year-old had lost his two children and eventually also his wife when at work on this score. Revivals, not least the Philips recording in the mid-1970s, showed that the music isn't at all bad and the aria recorded here is delightful.

The premiere of *La battaglia di Legnano* in January 1849 was, according to Roger Parker 'a clamorous success, with the entire final act encored'. It seems that this happened at every performance during the original run at Teatro Argentina in Rome. Lida's aria from the first act should have caused a furore too, at least if it was sung as exquisitely by the original Lina, Teresa De Giuli Borsi, as it is on this disc.

Ernani was Verdi's greatest success until *Il trovatore* was presented nine years later. It was also the first opera to be recorded complete as early as 1904. *Ernani, involami* has been a vehicle for fluent sopranos at recitals. Lucia Aliberti delivers lovely pianissimo singing and fluent coloratura. Here, as in other places, her highest notes are sometimes strained.

In latter years *I due Foscari* has been played in several opera houses and possibly the most spectacular production was in Los Angeles in September 2012 when Plácido Domingo sang the baritone role of Francesco Foscari for the first time. The soprano aria here is very beautiful and has an energetic cabaletta. The first Lucrezia in this opera was Marianna Barbieri-Nini. She was also the first Lady Macbeth three years later. A highly dramatic singer she also encompassed splendid coloratura. When Aliberti finished this traversal through 12 Verdi heroines with Lady Macbeth it is a fascinating thought that she follows in Barbieri-Nini's footsteps. I never thought of Aliberti as a truly dramatic soprano. *Si colmi il calice* is on the other hand one of the Lady's more lyrical outbursts. Unfortunately I was only able to play the first minute or so of this track, then it stuck. What I heard was very attractive.

By and large, with the small reservations I have expressed, this is a fine recital with a lot of rare repertoire. The recording is first class, the orchestra good and Caetani an experienced Verdian. Ideally, though, I would have liked to have had English translations of the sung texts.

Göran Forsling

With some small reservations this is a fine recital with a lot of rare repertoire.

Track listing

I vespri Siciliani (1855)

1. *Mercé, dilette amiche* [3:19] I masnadieri (1847)
2. *Tu del mio Carlo al seno* [3:41]
3. *Carlo vive?* [2:35] Alzira (1845)
4. *Da Gusman, su fragil barca* [4:03]
5. *Nell'astro che piu fulgido* [3:30] Attila (1846)
6. *Allor che i forti corrono* [2:58]
7. *Da te questo or m'è concesso* [2:29] Aroldo (1857)
8. *Ah! Dagli scanni eterei* [3:08]
9. *Ah, dal sen di quella tomba* [3:58] I Lombardi alla prima Crociata (1843)
10. *Se vano é il pregare* [3:54]
11. *I vinti sorgono* [4:16] Giovanna d'Arco (1845)
12. *Sempre all'alba ed alla sera* [4:19] Un giorno di regno (1840)
13. *Non san quant' io nel petto ...* [4:57]
14. *Non vo' quel vecchio* [3:02] La Battaglia di Legnano (1849)
15. *Quante volte come un dono* [3:10]
16. *A frenarti, o cor nel petto* [3:36] Ernani (1844)
17. *Ernani, involami* [4:28]
18. *Tutto sprezzo che d'Ernani* [3:09] I due Foscari (1844)
19. *Tu al cui sguardo onnipossente* [3:54]
20. *O patrizi, tremate* [2:29] Macbeth (1847)
21. *Si colmi il calice* [3:08]