

Puccini - Le Villi (Aprea) [1995]

Written by bluesever

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1. Preludio 2:29 2. Atto Primo: *Evviva! Evviva! Evviva!* 6:03 3. Atto Primo: *Se come voi piccina io fossi* 7:13 4. Atto Primo: *Non esser, Anna mia, mesta s'è tanto* 5:45 5. Atto Primo: *Presto! Presto in viaggio!* 2:05 6. Atto Primo: *Angiol di Dio* 6:20 7. Atto Primo: *Intermezzo prima parte: l' abbandono* 5:00 8. Atto Primo: *Intermezzo seconda parte: la tregenda* 4:54 9. Atto Secondo: *No, possibil non è* 7:59 10. Atto Secondo: *Torna ai felici di* 8:03 11. Atto Secondo: *O sommo Iddio* 3:13 12. Atto Secondo: *Roberto!* 6:11 13. Atto Secondo: *Qui noi t' aspettiam, traditor* 3:23 Nanà Gordaze (Soprano) José Cura (Tenor) Stefano Antonucci (Baritone) Massimo Foschi (Spoken Vocals) Slovak Chamber Choir Sl'uk Italian International Orchestra Bruno Aprea – conductor

The curtain goes up on Puccini's opera career with *Le Villi*. Called an opera-ballet, this hour long work is a strange construction of singing and recitation. It was conceived as a one-act opera, which was written for the competition sponsored by the publisher Edouardo Sonzogno. A few years after *Le Villi* did not even place, composer Pietro Mascagni would win this contest with his *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Six months before the deadline, Puccini decided to enter the contest and with the help of his teacher, Amilacare Ponchielli, he obtained a libretto by Ferdinando Fontana. Based on the same story as that of the ballet *Giselle* by Adolphe Adam, the story was derived from an old Germanic legend. Fighting against the deadline, it was submitted to the contest in a hardly legible copy, which may have resulted in its failure to capture the judges' acceptance. History has not been kind to the works that did win, such as Guglielmo Zuelli's *La Fata del Nord* and Luigi Borelli's *Anna e Gualberto*. Even though it failed this first test, Fontana and Ponchielli still believed in the work, and their championship led to an audition of parts of the score for Arrigo Boito. As the composer of the operas *Mefistofele* and *Nerone*, and the librettist of Verdi's *Falstaff* and *Otello*, Boito was in a position to get commitments of both funds and intentions necessary to get the work mounted. The original announcement of the premiere could not have been less enthusiastic: "Tonight at the Teatro dal Verme will be given the first performance of another of the operas submitted to the competition of the Teatro Illustrato, one of the works that received neither a prize nor an honorable mention." In spite of this, at the premiere, portions of the work had to be repeated and at the end of the performance there were 18 curtain calls. The critics were likewise taken by the work,

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enough so that Giulio Ricordi acquired the rights to the work. The publisher advised that the work be lengthened to two acts, which was done for its first performance at the Teatro Reggio in Turin, the day after Christmas 1884. A month later it played to a less enthusiastic audience at La Scala, followed by a performance in Naples at the San Carlo Opera where it was hissed and booed. Performances in Hamburg were conducted by Gustav Mahler, and at the Metropolitan Opera in New York by Arturo Toscanini. The work has many fine lyric moments including a couple of tenor arias that show that from the beginning Puccini had a superior gift for passionate melody. There is even one of the rare, for Puccini, examples of an aria for the baritone. However, the fantastic plot, coupled with melodramatic recitations, and the inclusion of a ballet, however musically effective, make this a curious mixture of elements that never quite jells. Yet, for all its faults, one still must strongly suspect that it is a far more interesting work than the winners of the competition for which it was written. ---Eric Goldberg, Rovi

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