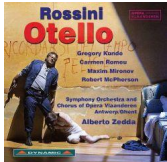


Gioachino Rossini – Otello (Zedda) [2014]

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Otello, Act I 1.Act I: Sinfonia 2.Act I Scene 1: Viva Otello, viva il prode (Populace) 3.Act I Scene 1: Recitative: Vincemmo, o prodi (Otello, Doge, Jago, Rodrigo) 4.Act I Scene 1: Cavatina: Ah si, per voi già sento (Otello, Jago, Populace) 5.Act I Scene 2: Rodrigo! Elmiro! (Elmiro, Rodrigo) 6.Act I Scene 3: Duet: No, non temer, serena (Jago, Rodrigo) 7.Act I Scene 4: Recitative: Inutile e quel pianto (Emilia, Desdemona) 8.Act I Scene 4: Duet: Vorrei, che il tuo pensiero (Desdemona, Emilia) 9.Act I Scenes 4-10: Recitative: Ma che miro! (Desdemona, Jago, Rodrigo, Elmiro) 10.Act I Scene 11: Santo Imen! (Chorus, Maidens) 11.Act I Scene 12: Scene: Nel cor d'un padre amante (Elmiro, Rodrigo, Desdemona) 12.Act I Scene 12: Trio: Ti parli l'amore (Rodrigo, Elmiro, Desdemona) 13.Act I Scene 13: Scene: L'infida, ahime che miro! (Otello, His Followers, Rodrigo, Elmiro, Desdemona) 14.Act I Scene 13: Quintet: Incerta l'anima (All) 15.Act I Scene 13: Finale: Parti, crudel (Rodrigo, Otello, Desdemona, Elmiro, All)
Otello, Act II

1.Act II Scene 1: Recitative: Lasciami (Desdemona, Rodrigo) 2.Act II Scene 1: Aria: Che ascolto? (Rodrigo) 3.Act II Scene 2: Recitative: M'abbandono! Disparve! (Desdemona) 4.Act II Scene 5: Scene and Recitative: Che feci! Ove mi trasse (Otello) 5.Act II Scene 6: Duet: Non m'inganno: al mio rivale (Otello, Jago) 6.Act II Scene 6: Stretta: L'ira d'avverso fato (Jago) 7.Act II Scene 7: Recitative: E a tanto giunger puote (Otello) - Scene 8: Rodrigo! ... (Otello, Rodrigo) 8.Act II Scene 8: Duet: Ah! vieni, nel tuo sangue (Rodrigo, Otello) 9.Act II: Che fiero punto e questo (Rodrigo, Otello, Desdemona) 10.Act II Scene 9: Stretta: Tra tante smanie, e tante (Otello, Rodrigo, Desdemona) 11.Act II Scene 10: Scene: Desdemona! che veggo! (Emilia, Desdemona) 12.Act II Scene 10: Finale: Che smania! ahime! (Desdemona) - Scene 11: Qual nuova (Desdemona, Maidens, Confidants, Elmiro) 13.Act II Scene 11: Andantino and Stretta: L'error d'un infelice (Desdemona, Elmiro, Maidens, Confidants)

Otello, Act III

1.Act III: Recitativo: Ah! Dagli affanni oppressa (Desdemona, Emilia) 2.Act III: Canzone: Nessun maggior dolore (Gondolier, Desdemona, Emilia) 3.Act III: Canzone: Assisa a' pie d'un salice (Desdemona, Emilia) 4.Act III: Preghiera: Deh calma, o Ciel, nel sonno (Desdemona) 5.Act III: Scena: Eccomi giunto inosservato, e solo (Otello, Desdemona) 6.Act III Scene 3: Duet: Non arrestare il colpo ... (Desdemona, Otello) 7.Act III Scene 3: Stretta: Notte per me funesta! (Otello, Desdemona) 8.Act III Scene 3: Finale: Che sento! ... Chi batte! (Otello, Lucio)

Gregory Kunde (tenor) – Otello Carmen Romeu (soprano) – Desdemona Maxim Mironov (tenor) – Rodrigo Robert McPherson (tenor) – Iago Josef Wagner (bass-baritone) – Elmiro Barberigo Raffaella Lupinacci (mezzo) – Emilia Maarten Heirman (tenor) – The Doge of

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Venice Stephan Adriaens (tenor) – A Gondolier Symphony Orchestra and Chorus of Opera Vlaanderen, Antwerp/Ghent/ Alberto Zedda – conductor rec. Opera House of Antwerp, Belgium, 14, 16, 18 February 2014

Rossini's *Otello*, premiered on 4 December 1816, deviates considerably from Shakespeare's drama and thus also from Verdi's work, with a marvellous libretto by Arrigo Boito. Firstly it is set in Venice and not on Cyprus, the scheming Iago is a much less diabolic character who disappears after act II, while Rodrigo here is a central figure and allotted some of the most testing music. To have both these two and *Otello* as tenors reduces the contrasts. As a matter of fact *Otello* was for many decades during the nineteenth century sung by baritones. Despite some dramatic weaknesses it was for many years one of the most frequently performed of Rossini's operas and it is still revived in Italy and elsewhere.

It has been recorded a number of times and the classic version is the Philips set from 1978 with José Carreras, Frederica von Stade and Salvatore Fisichella under Jesús López-Cobos but the Opera Rara recording from 1999 under David Parry with Bruce Ford, Elisabeth Futral and William Matteuzzi is a worthy contender, presenting an alternative version with a happy ending. More recently than that Naxos issued a recording from the Rossini Festival at Wildbad with Michael Spyres, Jessica Pratt and Filippo Adami and Antonino Fogliani at the helm.

Seeing the name Alberto Zedda as conductor of the present set gives high hopes. Since his conducting debut in 1956 with *Il barbiere di Siviglia* he has been known as a leading authority on Rossini and, together with Philip Gossett, has been responsible for the complete critical edition of Rossini's operas. Age 86 when the recording was made he still radiates vitality and youthfulness. Throughout the performance – in reality assembled from three different evenings pasted together – one feels in safe hands. He shows his mettle in the typically Rossinian overture with delectable woodwind solos and crescendos.

Listeners accustomed to Verdi's masterpiece, which begins with the most formidable storm scene in all opera, will find that the dramatic temperature in Rossini's version takes some time to get above zero and it never really reaches boiling point. On the way to the inevitable end there are several high-spots nevertheless and the journey is well worth the effort. Quite often Rossini comes up with attractive ideas, one of the best being Rodrigo's second act aria *Che ascolto. Ahimé che dici* (CD 2 tr. 2). It's a beautiful melody, followed by an intensely dramatic section, while the thematic material in the third section is well-known by anyone who has heard the famous Cat Duet, which in fact was compiled almost ten years later from this scene. Who

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the compiler was is not clear.

The solo singing on this set is variable but we must keep in mind that the technical demands on the singers are extremely high. The title role is taken by Gregory Kunde, who for more than thirty years has been one of the foremost tenors in, primarily, French and Italian repertoire. When this recording was made he was already sixty and the tone is drier and more strained than it once was. His Lakmé Virgin Classics recording with Natalie Dessay finds him in ideal shape but his long experience and dramatic intensity allows him to draw a memorable portrait of the warrior. His stamina is admirable. Young Spanish soprano Carmen Romeu is also dramatically strong and her willow song – with the long harp prelude – and the prayer (CD 3 tr. 3-4) are well sung. Elsewhere her tone tends to be rather fluttery. Much the best singing comes from Maxim Mironov, Russian-born lyric tenor, now in his mid-thirties. He has the technical ability, he phrases musically and his tone is liquid and mellifluous. He must be ranked among the most accomplished singers of his generation in this repertoire. Robert McPherson's Iago is bright-toned with a penetrating voice and the part is terribly demanding. There is however a fourth tenor worth an accolade — Stephan Adriaens — who at the beginning of the third act sings the Gondolier's *Nessun maggior dolore* (CD 3 tr. 2) really beautifully.

As with most opera recordings, in particular those recorded live, there are swings and roundabouts. There is a lot of dramatically convincing singing and acting but also some less attractive things. I haven't heard the Opera Rara recording, but there are reliable names there, well at home in bel canto repertoire. The Philips recording, which seems to be available only as a download, has the delectable Frederica von Stade as Desdemona. For a present day recording I prefer the Naxos set with Michael Spyres a more lyrical singer than Gregory Kunde. He has enough heft for the role and is much the freshest of the two. For all her accomplishments Carmen Romeu can't measure up against Naxos's Jessica Pratt as Desdemona and Filippo Adami sings Rodrigo with elegance. Moreover the Naxos comes on two CDs at budget price while the Dynamic is on three medium price discs and costs about twice as much as the Naxos. ---Göran Forsling, musicweb-international.com

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