

## Aleksandra Kurzak & Roberto Alagna - Puccini In Love (2018)

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1 Tosca: "Mario!" - "Son Qui!" 12:13 2 La Bohème: "O Soave Fanciulla" 3:46 3 Manon Lescaut: "Vedete? Io Son Fedele" 5:20 4 Il Tabarro: "É Ben Altro Il Mio Sogno!" 3:58 5 Manon Lescaut: "Tu, Tu, Amore? Tu?" 7:58 6 La Rondine: "Paulette!" 2:16 7 La Fanciulla Del West: "Minnie... Che Dolce Nome!" 3:58 8 Il Tabarro: "Dimmi: Perché Gli Hai Chiesto" 4:53 9 La Rondine: "Nella Tua Casa" 6:14 10 Madama Butterfly: "Viene La Sera" 14:16  
Aleksandra Kurzak - Soprano Roberto Alagna - Tenor Sinfonia Varsovia Riccardo Frizza - Conductor

“Puccini in Love” surveys mostly well-known love duets from Puccini’s canon. Because the music will be familiar to opera aficionados, the album’s success or failure depends on whether the interpreters can make the familiar fresh.

Mission accomplished. Marketing at Sony is betting on the love-story behind the album to sell the project, but its success has little to do with conjugal passion. Other performances by virtual strangers have sounded as or more passionate. Roberto Alagna and Aleksandra Kurzak, real-life husband and wife, succeed because of their interpretive talents and deep professional investment.

Alagna is like the Bob Dylan of opera, a convincing interpreter with vocal quirks. His voice has never had the pure beauty of other major tenors and in recent years has become leathery, sometimes coarse. He sings with the abandon of a di Stefano, but the voice tends to sound more “covered” and sometimes unfulfilled.

Pitch, especially at the top, is sometimes a shade imprecise. And yet, by sheer force of will,

passion, investment, and charisma he can make music ring “true.” There are other great tenors around today, but no current voice is as vital. If some inconsistency is the price listeners pay for moments of sheer exhilaration, it is a price well worth paying.

Here Alagna sounds most at home in selections that benefit from forthrightness and pulsing energy. He is on fire in the duet from “La Fanciulla del West,” “Minnie, che dolce nome,” where the music stays mostly in a comfortable range and where a certain aggressiveness is welcome. He avoids sentimentality throughout, especially at the start where others might indulge in some blooming effects in favor of a more matter-of-fact and believable rendering.

His take on Luigi’s music from “Il Tabarro” is also winning, as even shouty bits at the end of “Dimmi: perché gli hai chiesto” thrill rather than hurt the proceedings.

At other points, I wished for a little more nuance. “Vieni la sera” from “Madama Butterfly” has some of the most deliriously sensual music Puccini ever composed, requiring both manly bravado and moments of tenderness. Alagna has plenty of the first, but not enough of the second. A little too much pushing in “Tu, tu, amore? Tu?” from Manon Lescaut leads to some tonal muddiness here and there as well. Overall, though, Alagna’s work on this album is thoroughly convincing and effective.

Kurzak is this album’s true revelation. She does not have her husband’s star power nor that of his ex-wife and ex-singing partner, Angela Gheorghiu. But she is far from a second fiddle. Her voice is versatile and polychromatic. It has heft, but it can also thin out into silk-thread elegance especially in the upper reaches. In the middle she has a liquid tone, like a falling raindrop that never bursts.

Her interpretive powers are undeniable. Especially against Alagna who tends toward non-stop ripping sounds, her nuanced and varied reading of the music is refreshing. Overall, there is a blend of fragility and strength throughout.

It is a testament to Kurzak’s extreme care as an interpreter that the briefest instances become memorable. At the end of “Dimmi: perché gli hai chiesto” she sings “Come é difficile esser felici (How difficult it is to be happy)” deep in her range but without sacrificing even a little tonal clarity. The words are delivered with such convincing resolution as to make those few words

worth the whole album.

But there's more. Listen to the extraordinary way her voice ascends at the end of "O soave fanciulla" from "la Bohème." It sounds as if it about to break, but instead it stretches out into a lovely, thin, delicate sound.

There were less convincing moments, too. Her voice sometimes gets a little unclear in thicker passages as Minnie and in the selections from "Manon Lescaut." At the top, the tendency to thin out can lead to less happy endings than the "La Bohème" duet. At the end of "Nella tua casa" from "La Rondine" there is insecurity that veers toward sloppiness. Still, the general impression is of tonal beauty, crisp diction, and a colorful vocal palette put to excellent interpretive use.

When talents such as these come together, great things can happen. The excerpts from "Il Tabarro"– "É ben altro il mio sogno" and "Dimmi: perché gli hai chiesto"– are my favorites on this disc. Here both singers can soar high and land delicately on stretches of introspection. These tracks highlight the exciting results of matching Alagna's heat with Kurzak's more methodical elegance. Their musical approaches and instincts support and complement each other well.

To my ears, only one track fails. "Mario, Mario!" from "Tosca" is handled speedily with relatively little interpretive umph. Unfortunately, this is the first track. Were it not for the strength of many other selections, this meek start might have soured the whole project for me.

Part of the problem here has to do with the lackluster pacing and square shaping of the music by the Sinfonia Varsovi Orchestra as led by Riccardo Frizza. The "Tosca" duet isn't given the expansive sweep from which it benefits, nor does the orchestra bloom at critical moments. It's a testament to Alagna and Kurzak's prowess that they push against some choppy conducting throughout.

This is not a "perfect" recording, but it is a must for fans of the principals and it is an important listen for anyone interested in eminently believable and beguiling interpretations of Puccini's exquisite music. ---Freddy Dominguez, operawire.com

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Albumu „Puccini In Love” w wykonaniu duetu marzeń: Roberto Alagna i Aleksandra Kurzak. To pierwszy wspólny album tej pary wybitnych śpiewaków, gwiazd największych teatrów operowych Świata z nowojorską Metropolitan na czele, a prywatnie pary małżeńskiej. Usłyszymy wybór największych duetów miłosnych Pucciniego z La Bohème, Madama Butterfly, Manon Lescaut, a także z rzadziej wykonywanych oper jak Fanciulla del West, La Rondine czy Il Tabarro. ---empik.com

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