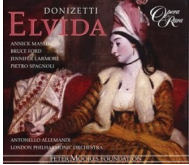


Gaetano Donizetti – Elvida (2005)

Written by bluesever

Tuesday, 02 August 2011 08:55 - Last Updated Wednesday, 30 October 2013 20:08

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1 Preludio 0:24 2 Tutto Cede Al Nemico Feroce 2:32 3 Dicesti Assai 4:29 4 Omai
Tant'Orgoglio 2:35 5 Ed Ostinato Ancor? 0:58 6 A Che Mi Vuoi? 1:49 7 Le Smanie Io Sento In
Petto 4:00 [play](#) 8 Ebben? Elvida, Ascolta 2:24 9 Se Geme A' Tuoi Lai 3:38 10 Si Grave E
Il Tormento 1:55 11 Misero Me ! 1:33 12 Cinto Di Nouvi Allori 2:50 13 Atra Nube Al Sole
Intorno 2:35 14 Cara Immagin Del Mio Bene 4:04 15 L'Empio Amur Si Sottrasse 0:40 16
Signor, Se La Clemenza 2:06 17 Elvida, Il Tuo Coraggio Dunque A Un Tratto 3:27 18 Padre,
Che Pensi? 1:41 19 Invan, Superba Invano 7:32 20 Deh! Ti Placa 4:33 21 L'Empio Cor Che
Chiudi In Petto 3:02 22 Ti Conforta, Signor. 0:41 23 Ah Padre! Alfonso 1:38 24 Il Cielo, In
Pria Sdegnato 4:25 [play](#) Amur - Pietro Spagnoli Zeidar - Jennifer
Larmore Elvida - Annick Massis Alfonso - Bruce Ford Zulma - Anne-Marie Gibbons Ramiro -
Ashley Catling Geoffrey Mitchell Choir London Philharmonic Orchestra Antonello Allemandi
– conductor

Elvida was first given in Naples in 1826 for the birthday of the queen. This one-hour one-acter was just a portion of a gala evening and Donizetti was pretty sure it wouldn't receive much attention despite the spectacular soloists--Méric-Lalande, Rubini, and Lablache--and he was right. He also didn't think much of it, and he was close to right there too. The unimpressive plot involves (soprano) Elvida, a "noble Castilian maiden", who is taken captive by a Moorish big shot (Amur, a bass), whose son Zeidar (mezzo, a travesty role) desires her. Elvida's fiancé Alfonso (tenor) comes to her rescue, and when Amur tries to kill Elvida, Zeidar stops him, and the two Moors are allowed to go free as tenor and soprano rejoice.

Donizetti hoped that Rubini's aria and a quartet near the opera's close would impress the audience, and, along with the final duet with chorus--a series of ever-more difficult vocal variations--they are the strongest numbers in the score, although bel canto fans also will relish the mezzo-soprano duet early on. These aren't great, original moments, but they're tuneful and cannot help make an impression when the singing is as good as it is here.

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Bruce Ford again proves that his sparkling high notes, agility, superb diction, and virile tone are remarkable. Jennifer Larmore uses a strong, manly tone to menace and woo Elvida, and Pietro Spagnoli's confident, flowing bass is just right as Amur, with an ability to express anger while keeping the sound unexaggerated. At the opera's center is soprano Annick Massis, who once more demonstrates that beautiful tone is possible throughout one's entire range, at every dynamic level and in languid as well as highly decorated music. She and Ford knock several out of the park with their final theme and variations. Chorus and orchestra are excellent, and conductor Antonello Allemandi leads as if this were a masterpiece. In short, this is one of those operas that lovers of great singing will find irresistible, while detractors of bel canto can argue that the music and text seem not to have much to do with one another. Big deal--not everything is Otello. ---Robert Levine, ClassicsToday.com

"Elvida" is a very early work in Donizetti's career - his fifteenth opera, coming some four years before "Anna Bolena," the earliest of his works to have entered the general repertory. As such, it's almost inevitable that it will prove to be not a neglected masterwork, but an interesting example of how one of the greatest composers for the voice honed his craft. Still, it's not without interest to listeners who enjoy early nineteenth-century Italian opera, and this recording does well by the piece.

The opera's plot bears a slight, oversimplified resemblance to that of Mozart's "Abduction From the Seraglio": Elvida, a Spanish noblewoman, held captive by the Muslim ruler Amur, awaits rescue by her lover, Alfonso. The twist here is that it is not Amur who has fallen in love with the woman, but his son, Zeidar (a travesti role). Spoiler alert - there's a happy ending for the Spaniards, and a pardon for the Muslims.

Donizetti sets the piece according to the dictates of his time, allotting his prima donna and primo tenore the only true solo arias in the piece, but giving the other principals strong presence in duets, a trio, and a quartet. One of the interesting technical innovations here lies in the way Donizetti ends each of the first two scenes, not giving us full stops with grand pauses, but practically dovetailing the music that ends one scene into the music that begins the next, so that the action is strongly continuous despite the need for three different settings - the stage crew at the San Carlo must have been scurrying to get the scene changes done quickly enough!

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In this recording, Annick Massis makes a fine Elvida, and Jennifer Larmore is even better as Zeidar. Bruce Ford is a little tight and steely as Alfonso - if I were Elvida and were judging my suitors on their vocal allure, I'd dump the guy and take up Zeidar's offer! - but he's still ardent and graceful. Pietro Spagnoli's Amur is authoritative and, where required, fiery. The singers' diction is excellent, and they handle their acrobatically florid roles well, articulating coloratura passages cleanly without aspirating them.

Conductor Antonello Allemandi proves a fine accompanist with the London Philharmonic, responding flexibly so that he moves things along smoothly while allowing the singers the breathing room and rubato that the period's style demands. The Geoffrey Mitchell Choir, generally playing various bands of Muslim and Spanish soldiers either heading off to battle or celebrating their victories, sings with lusty enthusiasm.

Opera Rara's production lives up to the label's reliably high standards. The booklet accompanying the set contains a fine English essay on the opera's background, a detailed English/French/German/Italian synopsis, cast and track listings (generously banded - 24 tracks over 66 minutes), full Italian-English libretto, numerous color photos of the recording sessions, and engravings and résumés of the original production's cast. <

The casual opera listener may not find a great deal of appeal here, but it's well worth the cost for those who love "bel canto" operas in general, or Donizetti's in particular, and it's certainly recommendable to fans of these singers. ---amazon.com

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