

Christoph Willibald Gluck – Ezio (Curtis) [2008]



CD1 01. Atto I. Sinfonia – Allegro 02. Sinfonia – Andante 03. Sinfonia - Allegro di molto 04. Marcia 05. Scena I - Recitativo: Signoe, vincemmo 06. Scena I - Aria: Se tu la reggi al volo 07. Scena II - Recitativo: Ezio, lascia ch'io stringa 08. Scena II - Aria: Pensa a serbarmi, o cara 09. Scena III - Recitativo: E soffrirai che sposa abbia la figlia 10. Scena III - Aria: Caro padre 11. Scena IV - Recitativo accompagnato: Pria che sorga l'aurora 12. Scena V - Recitativo: Ezio sappia ch'io bramo seco parlar 13. Scena V - Aria: Se povero il ruscello 14. Scena VI - Recitativo: Del ciel felice dono 15. Scena VI - Aria: So chi t'accese 16. Scena VII-VIII - Recitativo: Vedrem se ardisce ancora 17. Scena VII-VIII - Aria: Se fedele mi brama il regnante 18. Scena IX - Recitativo: A cesare nascondi 19. Scena IX - Aria: Ancor non mremi il soglio 20. Scena X - Recitativo: Via, per mio danna aduna 21. Scena X - Aria: Finché un zeffiro soave
CD2

01. Atto II. Scena I-III - Recitativo: Qual silenzio č mai questo! 02. Scena I-III - Aria : Dubbioso amante 03. Scena IV - Recitativo: E puoi d'un tuo delitto 04. Scena IV - Aria: Va' dal furor portata 05. Scena V-VI - Recitativo: Che fo? Dove mi volgo? 06. Scena V-VI - Recagli quell'acciaro 07. Scena VII - Recitativo: Folle č colui che al tuo favor si fida 08. Scena VII - Aria: Nasce al bosco in rozza cuna 09. Scena VIII-IX - Recitativo: Olř, qui si conduca il prigionier 10. Scena VIII-IX - Aria: Ecco alle mie catene 11. Scena X - Recitativo: Ingratissima donna! 12. Scena X - Terzetto: Passami il cor, tiranno! 13. Atto III. Scena I - Recitativo: E ben, da quel superbo 14. Scena I - Aria: Peni tu per un'ingrata 15. Scena II-IV - Recitativo: Olř, Varo si chiami 16. Scena II-IV - Aria: Per la memoria 17. Scena V-VIII - Recitativo: Generoso monarca 18. Scena V-VIII - Aria: Per tutto il timore 19. Scena IX - Recitativo: Partě una volta 20. Scena IX - Aria: Tergi l'ingiust lagrime 21. Scena X - Recitativo accompagnato: Misera dove son! 22. Scena X - Aria: Ah non son io che parlo 23. Scena XI-XII, Scena ultima - Recitativo: Inorridisci, o Roma 24. Scena XI-XII, Scena ultima - Coro: Della vita nel dubbio camino

Ezio, General of Caesar's armies, in love with Fulvia - Sonia Prina (contralto); Valentiniano, Emperor, in love with Fulvia - Max Emanuel Cencic (counter-tenor); Fulvia, Daughter of Massimo, in love with, and promised to, Ezio - Ann Hallenberg (soprano); Massimo, a Roman patrician - Topi Lehtipuu (tenor); Varo, Prefect, friend of Ezio - Julian Pręgardien (tenor); Mayuko Karasava (mezzo-soprano)

Il Complesso Barocco Alan Curtis - conductor.

Gluck desperately wanted to break away from the conventions of opera seria extant at the time of his earlier operatic compositions. He found the form of recitative and aria, as exemplified by Handel in particular, over-formalised and dramatically static. He did so in his *Orfeo ed Euridice* of 1762 as he also sought to move away from the convention of the use of castrati. The latter situation led to his re-writing *Orfeo* for Paris where the castrati tradition was not acceptable and the high tenor voice developed. Gluck's operas of this later period became known as his Reform Operas. However, like the operas of Handel and the earlier works of Vivaldi, we have come to appreciate the qualities of his musical compositions of the pre-reform period, a state of affairs greatly assisted by specialised female singers of vocal flexibility and the emergence of male counter-tenors.

Written to a libretto by the prolific Metastasio, *Ezio* exemplifies the formal opera seria that Gluck sought to leave behind. After *Orfeo*'s premiere in Vienna he revised *Ezio* for performance at the city's Burgtheater in 1763. His revisions accommodated the large size of the Burgtheater and the need for an expanded orchestra. While using the original 1750 version, this recording is slightly abridged omitting several contributions for the lesser comprimario parts.

Ezio is one of Metastasio's most dramatic opera librettos. Set in Rome after the defeat of Attila the Hun, it is based loosely on historical fact and follows the adulation that attended the victorious General's return. Metastasio grafted on an amorous intrigue. The story is one of the few of the period lacking any absurdities or situations which modern listeners often find difficult to accept. Details of the background of Metastasio's *Ezio* and Gluck's setting for Prague, along with an analysis, are included in an extended erudite essay by Bruce Alan Brown. It is given in English, French and German as is the full translation of the text and synopsis.

Alan Curtis is well versed in baroque music with several recordings of Handel operas. He brings a sure rhythmic baton to the proceedings along with his period band. His soloists have similar credentials to those of the conductor; their names often appear in performances and recordings of works by Handel and Vivaldi. All are nicely contrasted and expressive. I was particularly taken by the full-toned, yet flexible and expressive Sonia Prina in the eponymous role, notably in *Ezio*'s long opening arias *Se tu las reggi* and *Pensa a serebarmi* (CD 1 Trs.6 and 8). Her voice is well contrasted to the high soprano of Ann Hallenberg as *Fulvia* who gets the highly dramatic recitative and aria of the last act and brings considerable skill to her delivery (CD 2 Trs. 21-22). As *Valentiniano*, Max Emanuel Cencic's voice in some ways belies description. He used to call himself a male soprano claiming not to be a falsettist. Certainly on record, and I have also heard him in the theatre, his distinctive timbre is unlike that of any other counter-tenor I have heard. Cencic phrases the music with style and good expression, whether in drama or in the softer moments (CD 1 Trs.5-6 and CD 2 Tr.2). I was a little worried at first about Topi

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Lehtipuu as Massimo. He starts his opening solo and duet recitative with excessive cover to the tone (CD 1. Trs 11-12) and is well into the long aria *Se povero* before his voice clears and pings with its accustomed clarity (Tr. 13).

This well performed Gluck pre-reform opera, claimed by Curtis to be the best of the genre, is superbly recorded before and during a series of performances. It will be some time before another recording is likely to be forthcoming let alone bettered. ---Robert J Farr,
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