Christoph Willibald Gluck - Don Juan & Semiramis (1993)

01. Don Juan, ballet - Sinfonia. Allegro 02. Don Juan, ballet - 1. Andante grazioso 03. Don Juan, ballet - 2. Andante 04. Don Juan, ballet - 3. Allegro maestoso 05. Don Juan, ballet - 4. Allegro furioso - Adagio 06. Don Juan, ballet - 5. Allegro forte risoluto - Andante - Allegretto 07. Don Juan, ballet - 6. Risoluto moderato 08. Don Juan, ballet - 7. Gavotte play 09. Don Juan, ballet - 8. Brillante 10. Don Juan, ballet - 9. Allegretto 11. Don Juan, ballet - 10. Moderato 12. Don Juan, ballet - 11. Giusto 13. Don Juan, ballet - 12. Allegro - Presto 14. Don Juan, ballet - 13. Andante grazioso 15. Don Juan, ballet - 14. Andante 16. Don Juan, ballet - 15. Presto 17. Don Juan, ballet - 16. Allegretto - Presto - Andante - Tempo primo 18. Don Juan, ballet - 17. Andante 19. Don Juan, ballet - 18. Allegro giusto 20. Don Juan, ballet - 19. Moderato 21. Don Juan, ballet - 20. Andante 22. Don Juan, ballet - 21. Grazioso 23. Don Juan, ballet - 22. Allegretto 24. Don Juan, ballet - 23. Moderato - Presto - Moderato - Presto 25. Don Juan, ballet - 24. Risoluto e Moderato 26. Don Juan, ballet - 25. Allegro - Allegro giusto - Allegro 27. Don Juan, ballet - 26. Andante staccato 28. Don Juan, ballet - 27. Allegro 29. Don Juan, ballet - 28. Allegretto 30. Don Juan, ballet - 29. Andante staccato 31. Don Juan, ballet - 30. Larghetto 32. Don Juan, ballet - 31. Allegro non troppo 33. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - Sinfonia. Maestoso 34. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 1. Andante 35. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 2. Allegro 36. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 3. Moderato
play
37. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 4. Moderato, Grazioso 38. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 5. Moderato 39. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 6. Maestoso 40. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 7. Grazioso 41. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 8. Maestoso 42. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 9a. Affettuoso - 9b. Affettuoso 43. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 10. Adagio - Più Adagio 44. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 11. Affettuoso 45. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 12. Adagio 46. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 13. Allegro maestoso 47. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 14. Adagio - Allegro 48. Semiramis, ballet in 1 act - 15. Allegro assai
Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra Bruno Weil - conductor

Gluck made his reputation as one of opera's great reformers. He was the 18th century's Wagner, an artist who fought against the tyranny of the singer in order to establish a more unified conception of opera in which each element was subservient to the composer's dramatic

plan. But what made this radical concept work was a much more positive role for the orchestra, and it's a quality you can hear very clearly in these two ballets. The final scene of Don Juan, depicting his descent into hell, had a direct effect on Mozart when he wrote Don Giovanni. It's the first representation of real terror in music. This then is an important disc historically, but even better, it's highly entertaining musically. --David Hurwitz

This CD represents a considerable bargain. I recalled this very special music from a now out-of-print Decca recording with Marriner and the SMFO, and I remember the performance as being especially suave and polished, as usual with these artists. Weil's top-notch period band brings, instead of suavity, raw energy and eclat. Gluck is the winner, I think--and so are we. From the buoyant Sinfonia to the dark, hurtling Chaconne portraying the terrors of Hell, this is music of much resourcefulness.

The Chaconne finale, by the way, is lifted right out of Gluck's own Orfeo ed Euridice, but as H. C. Robbins Landon points out in his characteristically informative notes, it was the Don Juan finale that introduced German music to the Sturm und Drang movement in art. Chief among Gluck's imitators were Haydn and Mozart, no less. So Gluck's music is not only highly entertaining but of historical significance as well.

Among other highlights are the gracious Gavotte (No. 7) and the Moderato (No. 19), a fandango in which keening, scalewise passages in the second violins slice through the orchestral fabric like the proverbial tocsin in the night--great stuff!

Sermiramis is shorter and not quite so distinguished, but check out the grand Maestoso (No. 8) with its trumpets and drums or the very affecting pair of dances marked Affetuoso (No. 9a & b).

As I said, the performances are as exciting as the music, and the sound is big and bright. In fact, the piercing clarino trumpets may need to be tamed a bit in playback on your system. But you'll appreciate the chilling rasp the old trombones lend to the Don Juan Larghetto (No. 30) and finale (No. 31). Latch on to this one, lovers of the Classical era in music! ---amazon.com

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