Offenbach - La Périchole (1977)

1. Act I 2. Act II 3. Act III Régine Crespin (Soprano) Alain Vanzo (Tenor) Jules Bastin (Bass) Jacques Trigeau (Baritone) Ine Meister (Mezzo Soprano) Aimé Besancon (Tenor) Paul Guigue (Baritone) Rebecca Roberts (Soprano) Eva Saurova (Soprano) Germaine Baudoz (Mezzo Soprano) Gérard Friedmann (Tenor) Strasbourg Philharmonic Orchestra, Rhine Opera Chorus Alain Lombard – conductor

Offenbach wrote La Perichole just in his transition from his favorite genres operetta and parodies of Grand Opera, to writing 'serious' opera himself (Les contes d'Hoffman), and this can be heard throughout the score. There's still a lot of easy, lovely, tuneful music, and generous parts of humor, for example the role of Don Andres is a caricature of Napoleon the 3rd . But what's new is the more 'true' characterization of the lover's (Perichole & Piquillo) trouble, of which maybe the farewell (O mon cher amant) from la Perichole to Piquillo is the most 'serious' - yet not missing Offenbach's lovely sense for melody. The changes from 'the old' style to 'the new' style are sometimes abrupt, showing that Offenbach yet wasn't the perfect 'dramatizer' of serious moodes - but that's easily forgotten when listening to the beautiful music, and there's PLENTY of it to be found here, that stretches from ridicolous trios to mournful arias.

Maybe hard to record such an operetta / light french opera? If leaving the above mentioned details about the score aside - this is an excellent recording. All three leading roles are sung in exceptionally stylish french, with it's use of slight portamento and easy, sensual and heady tone. Crespin and Vanzo, the latter one of the most under-recorded lyrical tenors of his time, are as beautifully sounding as any soprano & tenor can get, and their 'acting' is good too. They might sound a little too old for their parts, but that's no great problems since they match eachother very well. Bastin as Don Andres is wonderfully pathetic and warm-sounding. All minor roles are well made as well, especially Besancon and Guige as the two notaries are great fun.

Lombard gives great support to the singers, and oomph to the music. The orchestra is really good and french sounding, the choruses are clearly audible (unfortunately quite rare in opera on record) and the sound quality is superb. The only negative thing to say about the recording is that all dialog has been cut, and the narrator of the original LP-version is also omitted. But sinces the libretto is included and the text that the narrator on the LP read is put in at the right places, it's no great deal to follow the plot.

The lover of Offenbach's operettas won't be disappointed, yet maybe a little surprised, and those of you who's found those operettas a little too light probably also will be positively surprised. Simply great! –Mr JB, amazon.com

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