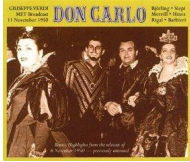


Giuseppe Verdi – Don Carlo (1950)



1.Act I Scene 1: Carlo, il sommo imperatore (Chorus, Frate) 2.Act I Scene 1: Io l'ho perduta! (Don Carlo) 3.Act I: Io la vidi e al suo sorriso (Don Carlo) 4.Act I Scene 1: Il duolo della teerra (Frate, Don Carlo) 5.Act I Scene 1: E lui! Desso ... l'Infante! (Rodrigo, Don Carlo) 6.Act I Scene 1: Dio, che nell'alma infondere (Don Carlo, Rodrigo, Chorus) 7.Act I Scene 2: Sotto ai folti, immensi abeti (Chorus, Tebaldo, Eboli) 8.Act I Scene 2: Nei giardin del bello (Eboli, Chorus, Tebaldo) 9.Act I Scene 2: La Regina! (Chorus, Eboli, Elisabetta, Tebaldo, Rodrigo) 10.Act I Scene 2: Che mai si fa nel suol francese (Eboli, Rodrigo, Elisabetta) 11.Act I Scene 2: Carlo, ch'e solo il nostro amore (Rodrigo, Eboli, Elisabetta) 12.Act I Scene 2: Io vengo a domandar (Don Carlo, Elisabetta) 13.Act I Scene 2: Ciel! non un sol, un sol detto (Don Carlo, Elisabetta) 14.Act II Scene 2: Perduta ben, mio sol tesor (Don Carlo, Elisabetta) 15.Act I Scene 2: Qual voce da me dal ciel (Don Carlo, Elisabetta) 16.Act II: Sotto al mio pie si dischiuda la terra (Don Carlo, Elisabetta) 17.Act I Scene 2: Il Re! ... Perche sola e la Regina? (Tebaldo, Filippo, Chorus) 18.Act I Scene 2: Non pianger, mia compagna (Elisabetta, Chorus, Rodrigo, Filippo) 19.Act I Scene 2: Restate! Presso al mia persona (Filippo, Rodrigo) 20.Act I Scene 2: O signor, di Fiandra arrivo (Rodrigo, Filippo) 21.Act I Scene 2: Questa e la pace che voi date al mondo? (Rodrigo, Filippo) 22.Act I Scene 2: Oso lo sguardo tuo penetrar il mio soglio? (Filippo, Rodrigo) 23.Act II Scene 1: Prelude 24.Act II Scene 1: A mezzanotte ai giardin della Regina (Don Carlo, Eboli) 25.Act II: V'e ignoto forse, ignoto ancora (Eboli, Don Carlo, Rodrigo) 26.Act II Scene 1: Al mio furor sfuggite invano (Eboli, Rodrigo, Don Carlo) 27.Act II Scene 1: Ed io, che tremava al suo aspetto! (Eboli, Rodrigo, Don Carlo) 28.Act II Scene 1: Trema per te, falso figliuolo (Eboli, Don Carlo, Rodrigo) 29.Act II Scene 1: Carlo, se mai su te fogli importanti serbi (Rodrigo, Don Carlo) 30.Act II Scene 2: Spuntato ecco il di d'esultanza (Chorus) 31.Act II Scene 2: Schiusa or sia la porta del tempio! (Araldo, Chorus) 32.Act II Scene 2: Nel posar sul mio capo la corona (Araldo, Chorus) 33.Act II Scene 3: Qui Carlo! O ciel! (Elisabetta, Filippo, Rodrigo, Don Carlo, Chorus) 34.Act II Scene 3: Su di lor stenda il Re (Elisabetta, Filippo, Rodrigo, Don Carlo, Chorus) 35.Act II Scene 3: Sire! Egli e tempo ch'io viva (Don Carlo, Filippo, Elisabetta, Rodrigo, Chorus) 36.Act II Scene 4: A me il ferro (Rodrigo, Don Carlo, Chorus, Filippo, A Voice from Heaven) 37.Act III Scene 1: Prelude 38.Act III Scene 1: Ella giammai m'amo! (Filippo) 39.Act III Scene 1: Il Grand' Inquisitor! (Lerma, Inquisitore, Filippo) 40.Act III Scene 1: Nell'ispano suol mai l'eresia domino (Filippo, Inquisitore) 41.Act III Scene 1: No, giammai! (Filippo, Inquisitore) 42.Act III Scene 1: Giustizia! o Sire (Elisabetta, Filippo) 43.Act III Scene 1: Ben lo sapete, un di promessa (Elisabetta, Filippo) 44.Act II Scene 1: Soccorso alla Regina! (Filippo, Eboli, Rodrigo, Elisabetta) 45.Act III Scene 1: Ah, sii maledetto, sospetto fatale (Filippo, Rodrigo, Eboli, Elisabetta) 46.Act III Scene

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1: Pieta! Perdon! ... per la rea che si pente (Eboli, Elisabetta) 47.Act III Scene 1: O don fatale, o don crudel (Eboli) 48.Act III Scene 2: Son io, mio Carlo (Rodrigo, Don Carlo) 49.Act III Scene 2: Che parli tu di morte? (Don Carlo, Rodrigo) 50.Act III Scene 2: Io morro, ma lieto in core (Rodrigo) 51.Act III Scene 2: Mio Carlo, a te la spada io rendo (Filippo, Don Carlo, Chorus, Eboli, Inquisitore) 52.Act IV: Introduction 53.Act IV: Tu che la vanita conoscesti del mondo (Elisabetta) 54.Act IV: E dessa! (Don Carlo, Elisabetta) 55.Act IV: Vago sogno m'arrise (Don Carlo, Elisabetta) 56.Act IV: Ma lassu ci vedremo in un mondo migliore, (Elisabetta, Don Carlo) 57.Act IV: Si, per sempre! (Filippo, Inquisitore, Elisabetta, Don Carlo, Frate, Chorus) Cesare Siepi (bass) – Filippo II Jussi Björling (tenor) – Don Carlo Robert Merrill (baritone) – Rodrigo Jerome Hines (bass) – Il Grande Inquisitore Lubomir Vichegonov (bass) – Un Frate Delia Rigal (soprano) – Elisabetta di Valois Fedora Barbieri (mezzo) – La principessa Eboli Anne Bollinger (soprano) – Tebaldo Paul Franke (tenor) – Il Conte di Lerma Emery Darcy (baritone) – Un Araldo Reale Lucine Amara (soprano) – Voce del Cielo Chorus and Orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera House, New York Fritz Stiedry - conductor rec. radio broadcast, 11 November 1950

There has always been a special aura surrounding the 1950 Met production of Don Carlo – the first in the house since 1922. It was the beginning of a new era – Rudolf Bing's – and the soloists were largely sensational. This was also Jussi Björling's last new role and the cooperation between him and Robert Merrill was to become legendary. The premiere on 6 November was telecast but no recording seems to have survived. On the other hand the matinée performance on 11 November was broadcast and a rather poor tape copy has been circulating among collectors for half a century. What is presented here is however something completely different. Ward Marston, foremost among audio restoration gurus, found more or less by chance a tape, in a collection of thousands that had been stored in his cellar for several years. When he listened to it he found that here was a source that was far superior to anything that had formerly been available. There was one hang-up though: the first six minutes were missing. In some other places there were also small portions missing, partly due to radio presenter Milton Cross speaking over the music. Through some patching of sections from inferior sources Marston managed to achieve a complete recording - moreover in sound that is not far behind what can be found on contemporaneous studio recordings. Playing the opera from start may initially be disappointing since this is from an inferior source with some disturbing noises. However, just before Jussi Björling's first entrance, we reach the newly discovered tape and after that most of the performance is a pleasure to hear.

The Metropolitan Orchestra was obviously in fine shape and the French horns in the prelude are superb. Austrian conductor Fritz Stiedry hardly belong to the most dynamic Verdi interpreters and his tempi are rather leisurely but this also brings gain, insofar as the wonderful orchestration is brought out. On the other hand expansive tempi put the singers' breath control to severe test. In particular soprano Delia Rigal has problems maintaining the musical line

without sagging.

While the orchestra is in good shape throughout, the precision in the chorus is rather so-so. This is most obvious in the chorus that opens Act II scene 2, which is decidedly sprawling. Presumably there were too many over-aged singers.

What was performed in 1950 was the four-act version, which was more or less the norm at the time. There are however numerous cuts, including second verses in a couple of arias. Far more serious is the omission of Rodrigo's *Per me giunto* in the prison scene, which is particularly deplorable since Robert Merrill sings with such ravishing beauty throughout.

It was a young ensemble that populated the Met stage that November afternoon. Jussi Björling, then thirty-nine, was the veteran and Robert Merrill had reached the respectable age of thirty-three – the rest were twixt twenty and thirty. The youngest was Lucine Amara, singing the little role of voice from Heaven. On the premiere night she made her Met debut – the beginning of a 41-year-long association with the house. Paul Franke was also rather new – he went on to sing more than 1500 performances.

Of the principals it is the two female roles that yield the least. Argentinean soprano Delia Rigal is shrill and shaky and lack-lustre in the middle register. Not until the final duet with Björling does she show her true mettle, when she sings *Ma lassù ci vedremo* in a lovely half-voice. Fedora Barbieri is far more convincing as Eboli and she has the dramatic power needed, but the singing per se is more variable.

Greatly impressive are the deep male voices. Cesare Siepi, like Ms Amara making his Met debut, had shown a couple of years earlier through a fine recording of Filippo's monologue that he had the measure for the role, but it is still remarkable that a twenty-seven-year-old can mould an ageing man so convincingly. There are few recordings that surpass Siepi's, vocally and interpretatively. In the following scene, a high-spot when the right voices are available, he is matched against the formidable and only slightly older Jerome Hines as Il Grande Inquisitore – a combat between giants! I have already mentioned Robert Merrill. The possessor of one of the most beautiful baritone voices in the history of opera and with necessary dramatic power he is a well-nigh ideal Rodrigo.

There remains Jussi Björling. Every lover of his art, and supposedly most lovers of great opera singing in general, must have heard the studio recording of the duet with Merrill from Act I, made little more than three weeks after the premiere. There is more forward movement in the studio version, thanks to Renato Cellini's faster tempo but the intensity is still higher on the live recording. Björling recorded nothing else from this opera – nor did any of his fellow singers set down their roles complete. This makes the present issue even more valuable. Björling's voice is certainly cut out for the role of Don Carlo: the slim blonde tone, the lightness of his phrasing and the almost overwhelming glow and brilliance of his singing. Once again it has to be pointed out that he was far from being the wooden actor sometimes maintained. Among competing tenors on other recordings it is only Carlo Bergonzi (for Solti) and Plácido Domingo (for Giulini) who come somewhere in the vicinity of Björling's level of achievement. Maybe the most exalted singing for sheer beauty comes in the last act in the aforementioned duet with Elisabetta. It is indeed hard to imagine anyone beating that. This is a priceless issue.

But this is not enough. As an extra bonus on the third CD we are treated to almost three quarters of an hour with excerpts from the premiere on 6 November – never before released. The source is an amateur recording from the telecast – with very variable quality. The anonymous recorder has constantly been turning the level up and down, resulting in certain portions being almost inaudible while others are affected by distortion. Sometimes the recorder has been stopped and the result is fragmentary. From this Ward Marston has still achieved something that is fully playable and as documentation this is just as indispensable as the complete radio broadcast. Differences in interpretations are minimal but one gets the feeling that there is some extra nerve in the singing on the premiere night. The greater part of the title role is actually included. No true admirer of Jussi Björling can afford to be without this issue. ---Göran Forsling, www.musicweb-international.com

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