

Giuseppe Verdi – Nabucco (Muti) [1986]

Written by bluesever

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CD 1

- 01-Sinfonia
- 02-Gli arredi festivi gi cadano infranti
- 03-Sperate, o figli
- 04-D'Egitto I sui lidi
- 05-Come notte a sol fulgente
- 06-Fenena!... O mia diletta!
- 07-Io t'amava! Una furia quest'amore
- 08-Lo vedeste Fulminando egli irrompe nella folta!
- 09-Viva Nabucco!
- 10-Che tenti Oh trema, insano!
- 11-Tremin gl'omsami del mio furore!
- 12-O vinti, il capo a terra
- 13-Mio furor, non pi costretto
- 14-Ben io t'invenni, o fatal scritto!
- 15-Anch'io dischiuso un giorno
- 16-Chi s'avanza
- 17-Veni, o Levita! Il santo codice reca!
- 18-Tu sul labbro de' veggenti fulminasti, o sommo Iddio!

CD 2

- 01-Che si vuol
- 02-Il maledetto non ha fratelli
- 03-Deh, fratelli, perdonate
- 04-Sapressan gl'istanti d'un'ira fatale
- 05-S'oda or me!
- 06-Chi i toglie il regio scettro
- 07-E l'Assiria una regina
- 08-Eccelsa donna, che d'Assiria il fato reggi
- 09-Donna, chi sei
- 10-Va, pensiero, sull'alo dorate
- 11-O, chi piange

12-Del futuro nel buio discerno
13-Son pur queste mie membra!
14-Dio di Giuda!...l'ara, il tempio a Te sacro, sorgeranno
15-Porta fatal, oh, t'aprirai
16-Cadran, cadranno i perfidi come locuste al suolo!
17-Marcia funebre
18-Va la palma del martirio
19-O dischiuso il firmamento!
20-Viva Nabucco!
21-Ah, torna Israello
22-Oh, chi vegg'io
23-Su me...morente...esanime...discenda il tuo perdono!

Matteo Manuguerra (Baritone) Renata Scotto (Soprano) Elena Obraztsova (Mezzo Soprano),
Veriano Luchetti (Tenor) Nicolai Ghiaurov (Bass) Robert Lloyd (Bass), Anne Edwards
(Soprano) Kenneth Collins (Tenor) Ambrosian Opera Chorus Philharmonia Orchestra
Riccardo Muti – conductor

“Con quest’opera si puo dire veramente che ebbe principa la mia carriera artistica.” (“It can truly be said that my artistic career began with this opera”). Verdi may perhaps be forgiven for taking artistic licence with this observation to Ricordi, his publisher. His previous works were the patchy and immature “Oberto” and the comic flop “Un giorno do regno”. “Nabucco” marks a huge advance over these. Verdi here begins to find his true voice, mining the rich seam of cantilena melody which characterises his best early work and adding to it both psychological profundity and economy of expression.

Re-visiting this recording and comparing it with those by Sinopoli and Gardelli, I was struck by the tautness and impact of the libretto and plot. All three recordings have their flaws but all three are to a large degree successful and I found that I had been wrong to relegate this one to third place. Verdi was as incapable as Shakespeare of creating cardboard characters and it is remarkable how both the villains of the piece, Abegaille and Nabucco himself, emerge as complex, tormented souls, far more absorbing than the supposed heroes. They are the forerunners of that long line of father-daughter pairs; Solera’s libretto stimulated Verdi’s imagination and his emotions at a time when he was trying to emerge from two years of grief and suffering, marked by personal loss and (comparative) artistic failure.

The popularity of “Va, pensiero”, the emphasis upon spectacle, the four marches, unison choruses and brassy scoring all combine to support the reputation of “Nabucco” as the chauvinistic rallying-call of popular legend. However, in the admixture of private passion and

political chicanery, certain situations and even specific musical ideas are clearly proleptic of later, greater works such as “Simon Boccanegra”, although the masterpiece it most resembles in mood, atmosphere and in its melding of extremes is perhaps “Aida”. Certainly his contemporaries thought well enough of it to choose its music to accompany Verdi’s funeral cortège.

Muti’s conducting of this 1977 recording has been condemned as crude and aggressive. He is hectic at times, to be sure, but that is hardly out of keeping with the swift pace of events and he still gives his singers space in the more contemplative passages. By comparison, the more experienced Gardelli lets the action unfold in more relaxed style and has a more persuasive overview of the score. Sinopoli is simply erratic, with too much of a stop-go approach, dissecting every bar and letting tensions droop before trying to whip up passion out of nowhere. Nonetheless, I prefer Sinopoli’s brisker, shapelier account of “Va, pensiero” to Muti’s uncharacteristically lugubrious version; Gardelli’s lies in between, as you might expect.

The eponymous starring role is in all three cases taken by a first class baritone. Manuguerra has the smoothest, most sheerly beautiful voice, with more sap in its upper reaches than the aging Gobbi and more bite than Cappuccilli’s woolly tone, but all three bring admirable virtues to the part: Gobbi is the most moving and characterful, Cappuccilli displays his celebrated long-breathed line in “Deh, perdona”, while the underrated Manuguerra combines some of the best features of both the others in a detailed, compellingly vocalised account.

As Abegaille, all three spinto sopranos - as Scotto had become by this stage of her career - provide the listener with thrills and vocal virtuosity. Dimitrova has a rather thin, wiry tone and the steam-whistle top notes, so typical of a certain type of Slavic soprano, tend to flutter, but she has the range and measure of this fiendish part. I sometimes think its worth owning Sinopoli’s recording just to hear her wonderful pianissimo top C alone. She has no especial psychological insights and her registers are disconnected, but it’s still a worthy assumption. Suliotis excels in a rôle tailor-made for a fearless, uninhibited twenty-two-year-old of formidable gifts and talent. She, too, suffers from poor integration of the two registers but capitalises on the contrast between her floated top and trenchant low notes. She is the artist who most recalls the formidable performance of Callas in her 1958 recital conducted by Rescigno. Scotto, too, shares features of Callas’s delivery, including a biting articulation of text and the less recommendable lapses into flapping top notes when pressed at forte. When not pressing too hard, Scotto can still float the top and hers is a formidable firebrand of an Abegaille - she is the best actress of all. Given the intensity and conviction of Scotto’s performance, I find that I am now much more forgiving of those squally high notes and inclined to prefer her to Dimitrova, who is technically superior but more generic in characterisation.

All three basses are fine artists: Nestorenko for Sinopoli has a mighty voice but lacks the warmth and authority of Ghiaurov - who is rusty and occasionally bleak of tone at this stage in his career but still impressive - or Carlo Cava, who has less voice than either but has thought more deeply about the inflection of words and nuances of character. All three make a beautiful job of their aria "Tu sul labbro", with its beguiling six-part cello accompaniment. Robert Lloyd is a notable High Priest for Muti; I wonder if I am the first to notice that he must have been absent for whatever reason (not worth paying him to sing so little?) during the second, 1978, recording session and thus we hear the unmistakable voice of Ghiaurov, deputising for Lloyd in the High Priest's one line in the finale.

In sheer vocal terms, Muti scores over Gardelli with Elena Obraztsova's Fenena. Decca made the mistake of simply under-casting Fenena with the inadequate Dora Carral, but the problem with Obraztsova is that she has far too much voice for so passive a character. Her stentorian tones are not a good fit for the delicate Fenena, although she vocalises better than either Carral or the late Valentini-Terrani, making a particularly fine job of her prayer in the last act.

One of the great pleasures of the Muti set is to hear Veriano Luchetti in the brief and rather ungrateful role of Ismaele. His smooth, ringing, Italianate tenor is far preferable to the clumsy Prevedi for Gardelli and superior even to Domingo, slumming it in a bit part for Sinopoli. Luchetti is particularly admirable in the lovely trio "Io t'amava".

The Ambrosian Chorus sounds a little lean in comparison with the Vienna State Opera Chorus or the Berliners but as ever they sing with verve and precision. The Philharmonia respond with alacrity to Muti's taut direction and the sound is excellent.

I remain irritated by EMI's inconvenient policy of putting the libretto on a third CD-ROM; I do not want to go to the trouble or expense of printing off my own and thus simply take a libretto from another set on my shelves - but not everyone has multiple editions of the less popular Verdi operas. One minor point: in this re-packaging (not a re-mastering, I think; this dates from 1986 but remains satisfactory), in the cast-list someone has managed to transpose the surnames of that estimable tenor Keith Collins and soprano Anne Edwards. ---Ralph Moore, MusicWeb International.com

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