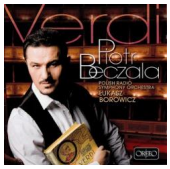
Piotr Beczala – Verdi (2013)



1. Rigoletto: Ella Mi Fu Rapita... Parmi Veder Le Lagrime 2. Les Vêpres Siciliennes: C'est Guy De Montfort… Ô Jour De Peine 3. Il Trovatore: Soli Or Siamo... Condotta Ell'era In Ceppi 4. Il Trovatore: Non Son Tuo Figlio... Mal Reggendo All'aspro Assalto... Inoltra Il Piè 5. Il Trovatore: Ah Sì, Ben Mio 6. I Lombardi Alla Prima Crociata: La Mia Letizia Infondere 7. Aida: Se Quel Guerrier Io Fossi... Celeste Aida 8. La Traviata: Lunge Da Lei... De' Miei Bollenti Spiriti... O Mio Rimorso 9. Macbeth: O Figli, O Figli Miei! ... Ah, La Paterno Mano 10. Messa Da Requiem: Ingemisco 11. Un Ballo In Maschera: Forse La Soglia Attinse... Ma Se M'è Forza 12. Don Carlo: E Lui! Desso, L'infante! ... Dio Che Nell'alma Infondere Piotr Beczała (Tenor) Ewa Podleś (Contralto) Mariusz Kwiecien (Baritone) Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra Łukasz Borowicz (Conductor)

Poland has always been a fount of great vocal talent, from the de Reszkes, Sembrich and Didur on through to Jan Kiepura, Teresa Zylis-Gara, Stefania Toczyska and many more. Three of the country's finest contemporary singers are assembled here on one disc. A Verdi collection spotlighting Piotr Beczala, it allows for guest apperances from baritone Mariusz Kwiecien and contralto Ewa Podleś. One comes away thinking we may be in the midst of a new golden age of Polish singing.

Beczala's lyric tenor graces twelve arias and duets here, with some thrilling results. He is not likely to sing all of these roles onstage in his lifetime — Radamès is a particularly iffy prospect — but the recording studio allows for such indulgences. Beczala is a singer of real intelligence and charm, with a clarion voice that records well. Those looking for sweet, honeyed timbre will be disappointed, but he can stand and deliver a muscular sound with clarity and drive. Most of the time that works, but there are drawbacks: he can also tend to launch too many phrases with a sob in the voice, and he succumbs to the temptation to belt out his final "Celeste Aida" phrase, rather than float it as Verdi specified.

These are relatively small quibbles about a singer who is otherwise first-rate. The moments at which Beczala pulls back and sings softly are few, but they are memorable, particularly a beautiful decrescendoed transition into "Parmi veder le lagrime" during the Duke's Act II scena in Rigoletto. He also displays some lovely piano phrasing in the "Ingemisco tamquam reus," from the Requiem, that almost puts one in mind of the way Björling sang these passages.

Beczala seems to really enjoy words; his diction and phrasing give wonderful added weight to the recit intro to Alfredo's "De' miei bollenti spiriti," from La Traviata. With Henri's Act IV aria from Les Vêpres Siciliennes, he is able to show off his ease in French and his ability to open and broaden his voice as he ascends. (That does not mean that the sound up there is always easy on the ear; at times it seems detached from the rest of his voice.) In Macduff's aria and in Riccardo's Act III scene from Un Ballo in Maschera, he demonstrates a fine sense of legato.

The tracks in which Beczala can strike sparks off his colleagues are among the best on the CD. The Azucena–Manrico campfire scene, from Trovatore — which includes Azucena's entire "Condotta ell'era in ceppi" — is white hot, with Podleś sounding possessed and Beczala matching her phrase for anguished phrase. Kwiecien joins him for the Act II scene and duet from Don Carlo, and their virile voices blend beautifully. --- Eric Myers, operanews.com

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