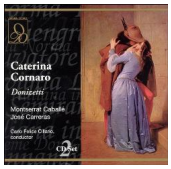
Gaetano Donizetti – Caterina Cornaro (1972)



CD1:

1. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Slave o beati, al giubilo 3:15
2. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Tu l'amor mio 10:48
3. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Or che l'astro in mar... Torna all'ospite tetto 4:08
4. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Vieni, o tu che ognora io chiamo 3:23
5. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Ah! Vieni t'affretta 7:21
6. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Spera in me 6:47
7. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Sei bella, o Cipro! 5:31 *play*
8. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Da che sposa Caterina 4:10
9. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Core e pugnale 6:48
10. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Vedi: io piango 6:51

CD2:

1. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Gemmata il serto 9:32
2. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Io non vengo a suscitare 9:34
3. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Indietro! Io, vil carnefice! 5:45
4. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Misera Patria! 1:43
5. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Io trar non voglio 4:06
6. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Oh ciel! Che tumulto! 3:03 *play*
7. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Pieta, o Signor 5:19
8. Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro: Orsu della vittoria 6:17

Caterina Cornaro - Montserrat Caballé
Gerardo - José Carreras
Lusignano - Lorenzo Saccomani
Andrea Cornaro - Enrique Serra
Mocenigo - Maurizio Mazzieri
Strozzi/A Cavalier - Neville Williams
Matilde - Anne Edwards

Orchestra e Chorus of Covent Garden
Carlo Felice Cillario - conductor
London, july 10, 1972

Caterina Cornaro was one of the last two of Donizetti's operas. (Dom Sebastien, the other one, is no better known.) By that point the old (and sick) dog had few new tricks, but the old tricks still had a lot of magic. The opera in its initial staging in Naples was considered to be a fiasco. Whether this was due to poor quality of the music, a weak libretto, or the fact that the Neapolitan opera goers had been exposed to the much more innovative works of Mercadante may be an open question, but one can really eliminate the first reason. This opera is mature Donizetti, with much worthwhile in it even if it does not sound strikingly different from much else that he wrote.

This recording (apparently from a "live" concert performance rather than a theatrical performance) features a very strong cast. Monserrat Caballe was at the height of her powers and produces some lovely singing, though her "trademark" failures are also evident. Some of these, however, do make the music more interestingly distinctive! Jose Carreras was also at the height of his powers and this music matches well the really fine aspects of his voice and the strengths of his musicianship. The choral singing (the chorus and orchestra are from the Royal Opera House Covent Garden) is impressive and the conducting sound. The recorded sound leaves much to be desired, and surprisingly for a concert performance is rather variable. At its best, it is acceptably clear and some of this features Caballe. At its worst it is very muddy and distorted. (Where does Opera d'Oro get its raw material - the booklet gives no indication?) Usually it is not bad enough to scrap the opera though there are parts where one reaches for the jump button. The booklet is the usual Opera d'Oro disgrace-a short essay by Bill Parker and a track index which only gives the first phrases of the tracks, with no indication of who might be singing or why. Similarly, it gives no indication of the provenance of the recording.

We are not likely to get a major new production of this opera any time soon and at the price one can overlook the weaknesses for the star-quality of the singing and coherent conducting if one has more than a passing interest in Donizetti. I don't know the alternative listed at Amazon - but it may well be better - though its price is higher. ---John Cragg

Once again, Montserrat Caballe proves why she was the reigning queen of the bel canto repertoire, especially in this neglected Donizetti gem. Although there is an excellent recording of this opera with Gencer, Caballe's mastery in this performance really reveals the true shadings

of the character. This is from the period when Caballe was truly in her vocal prime, and is well worth acquiring, especially given the quality of the recording for such a reasonable price. Also, this recording provides a rich insight into the treasure trove of fairly unfamiliar Donizetti operas which truly deserve to be heard by modern day listeners seeking a refreshing new glimpse into the golden age of bel canto. ---Armando Pazos

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