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3 CDs

PONCHIELLI
La Gioconda

Maria Callas

Barbieri • Amadini • Poggi • Silveri

CETRA Chorus • Turin Italian Radio Symphony Orchestra

Antonino Votto

Recorded in 1952

Great Opera Recordings

Amilcare

PONCHIELLI

(1834-1886)

La Gioconda

Gioconda	Maria Meneghini Callas
Laura	Fedora Barbieri
La Cieca	Maria Amadini
Enzo Grimaldo	Gianni Poggi
Barnaba	Paolo Silveri
Alvise Badoero	Giulio Neri
Isèpo	Armando Benzi
Zuàne	Piero Poldi
Steersman	Piero Poldi

CETRA Chorus • Turin Italian Radio Symphony Orchestra
Antonino Votto

Recorded by CETRA in the Auditorium RAI, Turin, from the 6th to 10th September, 1952
and released on 6 LP sides, LPC 1241.

CD 1 **54:04**

Act 1

1 Prelude 4:59

2 *Feste! Pane! Feste!* 2:57
(Marinai e Popolo)

3 *E cantan su lor tombe!* 2:03
(Barnaba)

4 *Figlia, che reggi il tremulo pie'* 3:32
(La Cieca, Barnaba, Gioconda)

5 *L'ora non giunse ancor* 2:50
(Gioconda, La Cieca, Barnaba)

6 *Gloria a chi vince!* 1:20
(Popolo, Marinai)

7 *Questi è l'uom ch'io cerco* 2:32
(Barnaba, Zuàne, Isèpo e detti, La Cieca)

8 *Suo covo è un tugurio* 3:05
(Barnaba e detti, poi Gioconda ed Enzo)

9 *Ribellion!* 3:59
(Alvise, Laura e detti)

10 *Voce di donna* 5:45
(La Cieca e detti)

11 *Enzo Grimaldo, Principe di Santafior* 5:47
(Barnaba, Enzo)

12 *Maledici? Sta ben* 2:06
(Barnaba, Isèpo, Gioconda)

13 *O monumento!* 4:03
(Barnaba)

14 *Carneval! Baccanal!* 2:35
(Popolo)

15 *Angele Dei…* 6:29
(Detti, Un Barnabotto, Gioconda, La Cieca)

CD 2 **76:46**

Act 2

1 *Ho! he! ho! he! Fissa il timone!* 4:02
(Marinai)

2 *Pescator, affonda, l'esca* 4:02
(Barnaba, Isèpo e detti)

3 *Sia gloria ai canti dei naviganti!* 4:19
(Enzo, Ragazzi e Donne, Marinai)

4 *Cielo e mar!* 4:32
(Enzo)

5 *Ma chi vien?* 1:36
(Enzo, Laura)

6 *Deh non turbare* 5:23
(Enzo, Laura)

7 *E il tuo nocchier* 0:44
(Enzo, Laura)

8 *Stella del marinar!* 2:11
(Laura)

9 *E un anatema!* 1:45
(Gioconda, Laura)

10 *L'amo come il fulgor del creato* 2:04
(Laura e Gioconda)

11 *Il mio braccio t'afferra!* 2:36
(Gioconda, Laura, Barnaba)

12 *Laura, Laura, ove sei?* 2:17
(Enzo, Gioconda)

13 *Tu sei tradito!* 1:15
(Detti, Marinai)

Act 3

14 *Sì, morir ella de'!* 2:42
(Alvise)

15 *Ombre di mia prosapia* 2:26
(Alvise)

16 *Qui chiamata m'avete?…*
Bella cosi, madonna 3:14
(Laura, Alvise)

17 *Morir! Morir! È troppo orribile* 2:27
(Detti)

18 *È già che ai nuovi imeni* 3:58
(Detti, Popolo molto lontano, Gioconda)

19 *O madre mia* 1:53
(Gioconda)

20 *Benvenuti, messeri!* 4:03
(Alvise)

21 *Grazie vi rendo* 3:02
(Alvise)

22 Dance of the Hours 7:54

23 *Vieni!… Lasciami! Ohimé* 2:07
(Barnaba, La Cieca, Gioconda, Enzo)

24 *D'un vampiro fatal* 6:15
(Tutti)

CD 3 **59:17**

Act 4

1 Preludio 3:19

2 *Nessun v'ha visto?* 2:07
(Gioconda, Un Cantore)

3 *Suicidio!* 4:34
(Gioconda)

4 *Ecco il velen di Laura* 4:25
(Gioconda)

5 *Enzo! Sei tu!* 3:30
(Gioconda, Enzo)

6 *O furibonda iena!* 2:42
(Enzo, Gioconda, Laura)

7 *Ten va, serenata* 1:08
(Voci di lontano e detti)

8 *La barca s'avvicina* 1:09
(Gioconda e detti)

9 *A te questo rosario* 5:35
(Gioconda e detti)

10 *Ora posso morir* 2:25
(Gioconda)

11 *Sì, il patto mantengo* 4:25
(Gioconda, Barnaba)

Appendix: Maria Callas: Three Arias
Recorded for CETRA in 1949
Turin Italian Radio Symphony Orchestra
Arturo Basile

12 Norma: *Casta Diva… Ah! bello a me ritorno* 9:04
(Bellini)
Recorded on 9th November, 1949
(Mat. 2-71296/7) Cat. No. R. 30041

13 I Puritani: *O rendetemi la speme…*
Qui la voce sua soave…
Vien, diletto, e in ciel la luna 7:12
(Bellini)
Recorded on 10th November, 1949
(Mat. 2-71298/9) Cat. No. R 30043

14 Tristan and Isolde:
Isolde's Liebestod (Wagner) 7:42
Recorded on 8th November, 1949
(Mat. 2-71294/5) Cat. No. CB 20481

Amilcare Ponchielli (1834-1886)
La Gioconda

The composer Amilcare Ponchielli was born in the small village of Paderno Fasolaro near Cremona in 1834. In this quiet agricultural community he received his first music lessons from his father, who played the organ at the local church, and then from a formally trained musician. Thanks to the support of a local aristocrat he was able to enter the Milan Conservatory when only nine years old. Determined to make a career in the world of opera and having graduated from the Conservatory, in 1854 he returned to Cremona, where his first opera, *I promessi sposi*, was produced in 1856. This was followed in 1861 by a second, *La Savoiarda*, which was well received. Ponchielli became very active in the region's musical life, directing the municipal bands of Piacenza and Cremona and conducting numerous operas as well as continuing to compose. Following a successful revival of *I promessi sposi* in Milan in 1872 he was taken up by the publisher Ricordi. His opera *I Lituani* was produced at La Scala, Milan, in 1874, with great success. This was followed in 1876 by *La Gioconda,* set to a libretto by one Tobio Gorro, who was in fact Arrigo Boito, an immensely influential figure in Milan, and himself a composer of note as well as the librettist for Verdi's two final masterpieces, *Otello* and *Falstaff*. Despite the great popular success of *La Gioconda*, critics pointed to its length as a weakness. Ponchielli continued to revise it, producing a definitive version in 1880, while continuing to write new works, such as *Lina* (1877), *Il figliuol prodigo* (1880) and *Marion Delorme* (1885). In 1881 he was appointed professor of composition at the Milan Conservatory, where his pupils were to include Mascagni and Puccini. By the time of Ponchielli's death in 1886, *La Gioconda* had been produced with success in Barcelona, London, New York and Rio de Janeiro as well as throughout Italy, where it has continued to hold a place within the operatic repertoire. Boito based his libretto for *La Gioconda* on a play by Victor Hugo, *Angelo, Tyran de Padoue*. As with many other operas inspired by Hugo's works, the plot is notable for frequent conflicts stimulated by love, lust and treachery, which provide rich dramatic opportunities.

Maria Callas took the title rôle in two recordings of *La Gioconda*, the first made in 1952 for the Italian label CETRA, and the second in 1959 for EMI. Although she sang the rôle only thirteen times in staged performances, this was a rôle that played an important part in the development of her career. In 1946 she had been engaged to sing Turandot in Chicago as part of a company of Italian singers. At the beginning of 1947 the company went bankrupt, but one of its members, the bass Nicola Rossi-Lemeni introduced Callas to Giovanni Zenatello, who was in the United States to find singers for the 1947 Verona Opera Festival of which he was the Artistic Director. He engaged Callas to sing the title rôle in *La Gioconda* at the Festival that summer. Callas thus made her Italian début in this opera at the Verona Arena on 2nd August 1947, in a production conducted by Tullio Serafin. Although a success, her performance did not initially lead to further offers of work. But by 1952, the year of this recording, Callas had conquered the audiences of La Scala, Milan, and was launched on her meteoric international career, confirmation of which was given by her signing a contract with EMI on 21st July 1952. Ironically two days earlier she had appeared once again as Gioconda at Verona, in a production conducted by Antonino Votto, and with the tenor Gianni Poggi, colleagues with whom she was to work again soon on this recording. It was made during September 1952 in the studios of Italian Radio in Turin, and, apart from Poggi, with different principals, orchestra and chorus from the recent Verona performances. Reviews of Callas's stage performances from this period confirm that she was already at her peak. For instance Peter Dragadze wrote in *Opera* magazine of her contemporaneous performances as Violetta in *La traviata* at Verona: 'Hearing Callas sing Violetta was an unforgettable experience. Her acting

technique is of the simplest and she appears to make no effort to dramatize the situation physically, as the colour of her voice depicts every emotion and sensation she is experiencing'. In November 1952 she appeared at Covent Garden in Bellini's *Norma*. Cecil Smith, again writing in *Opera*, commented: '...Callas held her audience in abject slavery. She rewarded them by never letting them down, and by reaching a peak of eloquence in the infinitely moving closing scene of the opera'. Both these verdicts could well apply to her realisation of Gioconda.

Matching Callas on this recording was the young mezzo-soprano **Fedora Barbieri**, who was also at the start of a major international career, which saw her become one of Italy's leading singers during the 1950s. Born in 1920, she possessed a powerful and exciting voice, and developed a repertoire of more than one hundred rôles. The tenor **Gianni Poggi** also developed a significant career in Italy during the 1950s. Here he contributes a virile reading of the part of Enzo, as does the baritone **Paolo Silveri** in the rôle of the villain Barnaba. During the late 1940s and early 1950s Silveri was considered to be one of the finest of Verdi baritones, and was especially popular at Covent Garden. The rôle of Alvise was taken by **Giulio Neri**, the possessor of a dark and powerful voice, which was particularly effective on record. The conductor of the recording, **Antonino Votto**, worked with Callas frequently and was also to direct her EMI recording of this work. Recommended by Ettore Panizza in 1921 as a conductor for the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, he was soon brought back to Italy by Toscanini, whose assistant he was at La Scala between 1925 and 1929. He conducted throughout Europe during the 1930s, and from 1948 was a regular conductor at La Scala. His conducting of the core repertoire of Italian opera was thoroughly idiomatic.

David Patmore

La Gioconda
Synopsis

CD 1
Act I The Lion's Mouth

1 The *Prelude* sets the scene in seventeenth-century Venice, the courtyard of the Doge's palace, decked out for a festival. In the background is the Giants' Staircase and the door that leads into St Mark's. On a wall of the courtyard is one of the famous lions' mouths, with an inscription inviting secret denunciations to the state inquisition. 2 It is a fine spring noon and people of all kinds are celebrating in the square, some masked and wearing all kinds of costumes. The informer Barnaba leans against a column, watching them. He has a small guitar slung over his shoulder. The signal is given for the gondola race, to which the crowd runs. 3 Barnaba, alone, reflects that they are singing over their own graves, as the spy spins his web. 4 One he would catch is the singer Gioconda, who enters, leading her blind mother towards the church. Barnaba observes them, planning to catch his butterfly. 5 Gioconda tells her mother that it is early for Vespers and leaves her to rest, while she seeks her lover, Enzo. As she makes to go, Barnaba comes forward, proposing love, which she indignantly rejects, breaking free with a scream that alarms her mother, who resumes her recitation of the beads of her rosary. Barnaba sees a chance to use Gioconda's mother to further his designs. 6 The crowd returns, escorting the winner of the race, while the loser, Zuàne, stands to one side in dejection. 7 Barnaba approaches Zuàne and tells him he has lost because his boat was bewitched by the blind woman 8 and others overhear the accusation. Enzo, disguised as a Dalmatian sailor, tries to intervene as the crowd attacks the old woman, seeking her death as a witch. 9 Alvise Badoero, one of the heads of the state inquisition, appears, with his wife Laura, who calls for pity, while her husband questions Barnaba as to the old woman's guilt. Gioconda begs Alvise for mercy for her mother, while Enzo returns with his sailors, resolved to rescue her. Laura recognises Enzo as her beloved Enzo Grimaldi, a Prince of Genoa, and Barnaba notices these signs of recognition between the two of them. Alvise decrees the old woman's release and Barnaba is foiled for the moment. 10 In gratitude to this voice of an angel that has secured her safety the old woman gives her rosary to Laura, who is about to kneel for the woman's blessing, when Alvise pulls her back and throws a purse to Gioconda, who herself loves Enzo. 11 The others go into the church leaving Barnaba alone with Enzo, whom he has recognised as Prince of Santafior, an enemy of Venice and, clearly, lover of Laura. Enzo may have sworn love to Gioconda but his meeting with Laura has changed matters. Barnaba will connive, it seems, at the meeting of Enzo and Laura on the former's ship in order to break Gioconda's heart at the infidelity of her lover. 12 Once Enzo has gone, Barnaba, now observed by Gioconda, who has emerged from the church with her mother, calls to the scrivener Isepo to write a letter to Alvise informing him of Laura's planned meeting with Enzo that night. 13 Barnaba contemplates the Doge's palace, its joy and horror, the old Doge, the Grand Council, but, above them all, the spy. He throws the paper into the Lion's Mouth. 14 Masqueraders crowd into the courtyard, dancing and singing. 15 Prayers are heard from the church and the people kneel, while Gioconda and her mother pass among them. She is moved by sorrow at what she has overheard, her betrayal by Enzo, and sees her destiny as death or love.

CD 2
Act II The Rosary

1 It is night on Enzo's brigantine Hecate, moored in the Fusina lagoon, by a deserted island. The sailors sing at their work under the light of the setting moon. 2 Barnaba appears, disguised as a fisherman and accompanied by Isepo. Challenged by the helmsman of the Hecate, he declares himself a fisherman, while assessing the strength of the crew and sending Isepo to put the look-outs in place. He continues to sing his fisherman's song, echoed by some of the crew, before leaving to carry out his plot. 3 Enzo comes on deck, planning to sail that night and ordering the crew to be

ready. The sailors resume their song. When all is ready, he bids them go below. 4 Alone, Enzo admires the beauty of the sky and sea, awaiting the appearance of his angel, his beloved Laura. 5 A boat approaches and Barnaba hails him. Laura boards the ship, falling into Enzo's arms. She is wary, however, of Barnaba. 6 Enzo tries to calm her fears, telling her that they are about to set sail. 7 She must stay on deck 8, while he goes below and Laura kneels in prayer before a statue of the Madonna. 9 While she seeks a blessing, Gioconda, masked, emerges from her hiding-place under the prow, offering, instead, a curse and declaring herself to be Vengeance on her rival in love. 10 Laura declares her love for Enzo, echoed by Gioconda 11. She seizes Laura by the arm, about to strike her with her dagger, only to break off as she sees a boat drawing near, bringing Alvise. Laura holds up her rosary in prayer and Laura, recognising it, gives her own mask to Laura and drags her quickly to her own boat, after revealing herself as Gioconda. 12 Enzo comes on deck, seeking Laura, only to be told by Gioconda that she has fled in remorse. 13 He suspects a plot but she draws his attention to the danger that approaches, since his name has been revealed to the Grand Council. Cannon shots are heard and Enzo, who will never surrender, sets fire to his ship and leaps into the sea, with the name of Laura on his lips, while Gioconda, from the shore, declares her willingness to die with him.

Act III The Cà d'Oro
Scene 1

14 It is evening. The scene is an antechamber in the House of Gold in Venice. Alvise reflects on the death of Laura. She escaped his dagger, but now he will use poison. 15 He calls out to his ancestors, as he plans to avenge his family's honour. In the house there will be merry-making that will mask Laura's groans, as she dies, satisfying his honour. 16 Laura enters at his summons, finely dressed. Alvise makes her sit, while he accuses her and threatens her with death. 17 She is distraught, having had heaven so near and now to suffer this punishment. 18 Alvise drags her towards a curtained doorway and tears back the curtain to reveal a catafalque, on which she is to die. Gioconda has stolen into the room and hides. Voices are heard from the lagoon in song, as Alvise gives his wife a vial of poison, which she must drink before the song ends. He leaves her to her fate. 19 Gioconda emerges from her hiding-place and seizes the vial, replacing it with another, which she urges her to drink. It contains a drug that will give only the semblance of death. Laura eventually drinks the sleeping draught and Gioconda changes the vials so that Alvise, when he looks in again, thinks that Laura has drunk the poison. Gioconda comes forward again, having for her mother's sake not only refrained from killing her rival but also having saved her rival for Enzo.

Scene 2

20 In an adjoining ballroom, magnificently decorated for the occasion, nobles and masqueraders are received by Alvise and the guests praise the fine House of Gold. 21 He thanks them for their compliments and introduces entertainment for them. 22 This is the Dance of the Hours, with dancers representing the hours of dawn, of day, of evening and of night. 23 Barnaba drags in the blind woman, whom he accuses of witchcraft within the house, but she declares she was only praying for the dying. The death knell is heard and Enzo, who has gained admission to the house, masked, reveals himself to Alvise, to the horror of Gioconda, who has rushed in. Enzo laments Laura's supposed death and the blind woman inveighs against the informer, who assures her that she shall not escape this time. Gioconda offers herself to Barnaba in return for Enzo's safety. Alvise draws back the curtain that conceals the catafalque and reveals his wife, whom he declares that he has killed. 24 Enzo throws himself at Alvise, but is held back by guards, while those present express their horror.

CD 3
Act IV The Orfano Canal

1 The *Prelude* introduces the entrance of a dilapidated house on the Giudecca. In a corner a screen conceals a bed and through a doorway at the back the water can be seen and the Piazza of San Marco. There is an image of

the Madonna and a crucifix on the wall, while on a table stands the vial of poison and a dagger. Gioconda has been waiting for the men, singers and friends of hers, who now carry the body of Laura into the house and lay it on the bed. 2 She asks the men, as they leave, to look for her mother, who has disappeared. 3 Gioconda, alone, can only contemplate suicide. 4 As she brings Enzo and Laura together, nothing is left for her. She looks at the vial of poison, which she will drink, although she is tempted to dispose of Laura. 5 Enzo, released from prison, appears, threatening to kill himself, now that he has lost his beloved Laura 6 and accusing Gioconda of having stolen her body. He threatens her with his dagger. Laura's voice is heard from behind the screen and she comes forward, revived, eventually recognising Gioconda as the one who has saved her life. 7 The sound of a serenade is heard over the water 8 and a boat approaching. Gioconda explains her plan for the escape of Laura and Enzo. 9 As she puts her cloak round Laura's shoulders, she sees the rosary given her by Gioconda's mother and begs them sometimes to remember her. 10 Enzo and Laura leave in the boat and Gioconda picks up the vial of poison, but pauses as she remembers her mother, kneeling before the Madonna, whom she begs to ward off Barnaba. He is standing in the alley outside and sees her praying. 11 As she determines to escape, he stands before her, demanding that she keep her promise. She asks for a moment to make herself more beautiful and starts to put on her stage finery, to Barnaba's delighted anticipation. Turning to him, she stabs herself, giving him her body in death. As she dies, Barnaba shouts in her ear that he has drowned her mother to repay the old woman for her insults. He makes off, in frustrated rage.

Keith Anderson

Ward Marston

In 1997 Ward Marston was nominated for the Best Historical Album Grammy Award for his production work on BMG's Fritz Kreisler collection. According to the Chicago Tribune, Marston's name is 'synonymous with tender loving care to collectors of historical CDs'. Opera News calls his work 'revelatory', and Fanfare deems him 'miraculous'. In 1996 Ward Marston received the Gramophone award for Historical Vocal Recording of the Year, honouring his production and engineering work on Romophone's complete recordings of Lucrezia Bori. He also served as re-recording engineer for the Franklin Mint's Arturo Toscanini issue and BMG's Sergey Rachmaninov recordings, both winners of the Best Historical Album Grammy. Born blind in 1952, Ward Marston has amassed tens of thousands of opera classical records over the past four decades. Following a stint in radio while a student at Williams College, he became well-known as a reissue producer in 1979, when he restored the earliest known stereo recording made by the Bell Telephone Laboratories in 1932. In the past, Ward Marston has produced records for a number of major and specialist record companies. Now he is bringing his distinctive sonic vision to bear on works released on the Naxos Historical label. Ultimately his goal is to make the music he remasters sound as natural as possible and true to life by 'lifting the voices' off his old 78 rpm recordings. His aim is to promote the importance of preserving old recordings and make available the works of great musicians who need to be heard.

The Naxos historical label aims to make available the greatest recordings in the history of recorded music, in the best and truest sound that contemporary technology can provide. To achieve this aim, Naxos has engaged a number of respected restorers who have the dedication, skill and experience to produce restorations that have set new standards in the field of historical recordings.

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3 CDs

Amilcare

PONCHIELLI

(1834-1886)

La Gioconda

ADD

Playing Time 3:11:07

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Laura	Fedora Barbieri
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Steersman	Piero Poldi

CETRA Chorus
Turin Italian Radio Symphony Orchestra
Antonino Votto

Recorded by CETRA in Turin from 6th to 10th September, 1952

Maria Callas took the title rôle in two recordings of *La Gioconda*, the first of which was made in 1952 for the Italian label CETRA, at a time when she had already conquered the audiences of La Scala, Milan and was launched on her meteoric international career. Although Callas sang the rôle only thirteen times in staged performances, it played an important part in the development of her career, including her Italian début at the Verona Arena in 1947. Among those partnering Callas on this acclaimed recording are the young mezzo-soprano Fedora Barbieri, who was at the start of a major international career, the tenor Gianni Poggi who developed a significant career in Italy during the 1950s and the baritone Paolo Silveri, who was especially popular at Covent Garden.

CD 1	54:04	CD 2	76:46	CD 3	59:17
1-15 Act 1	54:04	1-13 Act 2	36:46	1-11 Act 4	35:20
		14-24 Act 3	40:00	12-14 Appendix: Callas: Three Arias	23:57

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Ward Marston
Special thanks to Angelo Scottini

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A complete track list can be found on pages 3, 4 and 5 of the booklet

Cover Image: Stage design for Act Three Scene Two from La Gioconda by Luigi Bartezago, for a performance at Teatro La Scala, Milan on 8 April, 1876 (Private Collection)

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