

# *Duets to die for*

ORR 220



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**Booklet photographs:** Russell Duncan and Bill Cooper  
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## DUETS TO DIE FOR

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Geoffrey Mitchell Choir  
 Philharmonia Orchestra • Academy of St Martin in the Fields [6], [7], [9]  
 London Philharmonic Orchestra [8] • Royal Philharmonic Orchestra [10]  
 David Parry, conductor

Patric Schmid (producer)  
with Renée Fleming



## DUETS TO DIE FOR

THE NEGLECTED operas of the 19th century have been the focus of Opera Rara's work for more than 30 years. We've spent many hours poring over manuscripts and vocal scores, working through operas we might record, making new performing editions and eventually persuading (and, in some cases, begging) a lot of fine singers to learn and record music they are unlikely ever to perform again. During those (admittedly) delightful years of excavation, resuscitation and presentation it has been possible to follow the growth of Romantic opera in Italy. One way to see this is through the evolution of the duet.

To assemble a representative selection of duets meant returning to the vaults of Opera Rara (all recording companies have vaults; any record collector knows that) in search of forgotten treasures. Forgotten indeed! This subterranean visit produced nearly 100 duets – an astonishing reminder of the number of composers represented in our current catalogue.

On this album you'll find 15 encounters between friends and foes, lovers and rivals. And, in one case, reigning monarchs: the passionate duet for Enrico II and Leonora from Donizetti's *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra* sets the mood for this journey. From there, the programme continues in chronological order, affording listeners the opportunity to observe the progress of duet writing from 1801 to 1846.

Within the framework of the musical form, composers all reacted differently to the dramatic and musical possibilities. Giovanni Simone Mayr (*Ginevra di Scozia* and *Medea in Corinto*) is often called the ‘missing link’ between late-18th-century opera and the works of Rossini. The Romantic era is ushered in with the arrival of Rossini (*Bianca e Falliero* and *Otello*), Donizetti (*Zoraida di Granata* and *Anna Bolena*) and their contemporaries Meyerbeer (*Il Crociato in Egitto*), Coccia (*Rosmonda*) and Carafa (*Gabriella di Vergi*). The disc concludes with Giovanni Pacini (*Maria regina d’Inghilterra*) and Mercadante (*Orazi e Curiazi*). It’s not hard to see that in 45 years the rules for writing an operatic duet were broken and remade several times.

And those singers we lured into the recording studio? Well, really, it wasn’t so hard when they saw what delights the music held! Renée Fleming, Yvonne Kenny, Nelly Miricioiu, Bruce Ford, Rockwell Blake, Jane Eaglen, Majella Cullagh, William Matteuzzi, Diana Montague, Jennifer Larmore, Raul Gimenez, Elizabeth Futral, Alastair Miles, Della Jones – these are some of the gifted bel canto specialists who responded to the beguiling challenges of the music. They all came happily to the studio, ready to work that heart-stopping vocal magic that occurs when beautiful voices are joined in duet.

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## DES DUOS DE REVE

LES OPERAS MECONNUS du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle, telles sont les œuvres qu'Opera Rara s'efforce de faire redécouvrir depuis plus de 30 ans. Des heures durant, nous avons examiné manuscrits et partitions vocales à la recherche de nouveaux opéras à enregistrer et afin de préparer les nouvelles éditions nécessaires aux représentations ; ensuite il a fallu convaincre (et, dans certains cas, supplier) de nombreux grands artistes de travailler et d'enregistrer des pages qu'ils n'auront probablement jamais l'occasion de chanter à nouveau. Ces longues, et (certes) merveilleuses, années d'exploration, de mise à jour et de présentation des œuvres nous ont permis de suivre l'essor de l'opéra romantique en Italie. Or, son développement est particulièrement sensible à travers l'évolution du duo.

Pour réunir un choix de duos représentatif, nous sommes allés puiser dans les coffres d'Opera Rara (chaque maison de disques a ses coffres, comme tout collectionneur de disques le sait). Que de trésors enfouis ! Nous avons ramené près d'une centaine de duos – preuve étonnante du nombre de compositeurs représentés dans notre catalogue actuel.

Cet album propose 15 duos entre amis ou ennemis, entre amants ou rivaux. L'un d'entre eux réunit même deux souverains: il s'agit de l'échange passionné entre Enrico II et Leonora extrait de *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra* de Donizetti, qui définit bien le ton de l'ensemble. Le programme est ordonné chronologiquement afin de permettre aux mélomanes de suivre l'évolution du duo tel qu'il s'écrit entre 1801 et 1846.

Les compositeurs ont tous exploité différemment les possibilités dramatiques et musicales offertes par le duo en tant que forme. Giovanni Simone Mayr (*Ginevra di Scozia* et *Medea in Corinto*) est souvent considéré comme celui qui fait le lien entre l'opéra de la fin du 18ème siècle et l'œuvre de Rossini. L'ère romantique s'ouvre avec Rossini (*Bianca e Falliero* et *Otello*), Donizetti (*Zoraida di Granata* et *Anna Bolena*) et leurs contemporains, Meyerbeer (*Il Crociato in Egitto*), Coccia (*Rosmonda*) et Carafa (*Gabriella di Vergi*). Le disque s'achève avec Giovanni Pacini (*Maria regina d'Inghilterra*) et Mercadante (*Orazi e Curiazi*). Manifestement, les règles qui gouvernent l'écriture du duo d'opéra ont été démolies et reconstruites plusieurs fois en l'espace de 45 ans.

Si nous sommes parvenus, sans trop de difficultés, à entraîner tant de grands chanteurs à enregistrer ces pages, c'est qu'ils ont été enchantés par leur beauté et leur richesse. Renée Fleming, Yvonne Kenny, Nelly Miricioiu, Bruce Ford, Rockwell Blake, Jane Eaglen, Majella Cullagh, William Matteuzzi, Diana Montague, Jennifer Larmore, Raul Gimenez, Elizabeth Futral, Alastair Miles et Della Jones comptent parmi les plus grands spécialistes du bel canto qui se sont laissés séduire par cette musique. Ils ont volontiers rejoint notre studio pour faire advenir le miracle de deux belles voix se répondant en duo.

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## DUETTE ZUM VERLIEBEN

DIE WENIG BEACHTETEN OPERN des 19. Jahrhunderts stehen seit über 30 Jahren im Zentrum der Bemühungen von Opera Rara. Unzählige Stunden haben wir schon damit verbracht, Manuskripte und Singpartituren durchzugehen; wir haben nach Opern gefahndet, die wir möglicherweise aufnehmen könnten, haben neue Editionen erstellt und schließlich zahlreiche erstklassige Sängerinnen und Sänger überredet (und in manchen Fällen angefleht), Werke zu studieren und aufzunehmen, die sie voraussichtlich nie wieder singen werden. Diese (zugegebenermaßen) wunderschönen Jahre des Ausgrabens, Wiederbelebens und Darbietens haben es uns ermöglicht, die Entwicklung der Romantischen Oper in Italien nachzuvollziehen, eine Entwicklung, die man sehr gut an den unterschiedlichen Formen des Duetts darstellen kann.

Um eine repräsentative Auswahl von Duetten zusammenstellen zu können, mussten wir wieder in die Archiv-Gewölbe der Opera Rara hinuntersteigen (alle Studiofirmen haben solche Gewölbe, wie jeder Plattensammler weiß), um nach vergessenen Schätzen zu suchen. Wirklich vergessen? Die unterirdischen Expeditionen beförderten fast 100 Duette ans Tageslicht – ein erstaunlicher Beweis dafür, wie viele Komponisten in unserem gegenwärtigen Katalog erscheinen.

Dieses Album enthält 15 Begegnungen zwischen Freunden und Feinden, Liebhabern und Rivalen. Und in einem Fall zwischen herrschenden Monarchen: das leidenschaftliche Duett für Enrico II und Leonora aus Donizettis *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra* gibt die Stimmung für diese

Entdeckungsreise vor. Von dort geht das Programm chronologisch weiter und gibt dem Zuhörer so die Möglichkeit, die Entwicklung der Duett-Komposition von 1801 bis 1846 zu verfolgen.

Innerhalb des Rahmens der musikalischen Form des Duetts reagierten die Komponisten ganz unterschiedlich auf die dramatischen und musikalischen Möglichkeiten. Giovanni Simone Mayr (*Ginevra di Scozia* und *Medea in Corinto*) wird oft als das 'fehlende Verbindungsglied' zwischen der Oper des späten 18. Jahrhunderts und den Werken Rossinis gesehen. Die Romantik wird vorgestellt durch Rossini (*Bianca e Falliero* und *Otello*), Donizetti (*Zoraida di Granata* und *Anna Bolena*), sowie durch ihre Zeitgenossen Meyerbeer (*Il Crociato in Egitto*), Coccia (*Rosmonda*) und Carafa (*Gabriella di Vergi*). Die CD endet mit Giovanni Pacini (*Maria regina d'Inghilterra*) und Mercadante (*Orazi e Curiazi*). Es ist deutlich zu beobachten, dass innerhalb dieser 45 Jahre die Regeln für die Komposition eines Duetts immer wieder durchbrochen und neu festgelegt wurden.

Und was ist mit den Sängerinnen und Sängern, die wir ins Aufnahmestudio gelockt haben? Nun ja, als sie sahen, welche Faszination diese Musik ausstrahlt, war es gar nicht mehr so schwierig! Renée Fleming, Yvonne Kenny, Nelly Miricioiu, Bruce Ford, Rockwell Blake, Jane Eaglen, Majella Cullagh, William Matteuzzi, Diana Montague, Jennifer Larmore, Raul Gimenez, Elizabeth Futral, Alastair Miles, Della Jones – das sind nur einige der begabten Bel-Canto-Spezialisten, die sich von dieser Musik mitreißen ließen. Sie kamen alle mehr als gern ins Studio, bereit, die betörende Vokalmagie herbeizuzaubern, die entsteht, wenn sich schöne Stimmen zu einem Duett zusammenfinden.

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## BELLI DA MORIRE

DA PIÙ DI TRENT'ANNI Opera Rara è impegnata nel recupero delle opere dimenticate del XIX secolo. Abbiamo trascorso molte ore ad esaminare manoscritti e partiture vocali, ad analizzare opere per una possibile registrazione, a realizzare nuove edizioni per gli interpreti e a convincere (in alcuni casi, supplicandoli) tanti bravi cantanti a imparare e registrare dei brani che probabilmente non eseguiranno mai più. Questa gradevolissima attività di 'scavo', recupero e presentazione negli anni ci ha consentito di ripercorrere lo sviluppo dell'opera romantica in Italia. L'evoluzione del duetto è un modo per seguire questo progresso.

Per riunire una selezione rappresentativa di brani è stato necessario fare ritorno nei sotterranei di Opera Rara (i sotterranei esistono in tutte le case discografiche, come ben sanno i collezionisti di dischi) in cerca di tesori dimenticati. Da questa visita sotterranea sono emersi quasi 100 duetti, una testimonianza straordinaria del numero dei compositori presenti nel nostro catalogo attuale.

Questo album raccoglie 15 incontri tra amici e nemici, innamorati e rivali, addirittura monarchi, in un caso. L'appassionato duetto tra Enrico II e Leonora, tratto dalla *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra* di Donizetti, è il punto di partenza per il nostro viaggio. Da qui il programma progredisce in ordine cronologico, offrendo agli ascoltatori la possibilità di osservare il progresso di questo genere di composizioni dal 1801 al 1846.

Con i loro duetti, tutti i compositori reagirono in maniera diversa alle possibilità teatrali e musicali offerte dal genere operistico. Giovanni Simone Mayr (*Ginevra di Scozia* e *Medea in Corinto*) viene spesso definito 'l'anello mancante' tra le opere del tardo settecento e quelle di Rossini. L'era romantica è annunciata dall'arrivo di Rossini (*Bianca e Falliero* e *Otello*), Donizetti (*Zoraida di Granata* e *Anna Bolena*) e i loro contemporanei: Meyerbeer (*Il Crociato in Egitto*), Coccia (*Rosmonda*) e Carafa (*Gabriella di Vergi*). Il disco si conclude con Giovanni Pacini (*Maria regina d'Inghilterra*) e Mercadante (*Orazi e Curiazi*). Non è difficile vedere che in 45 anni le regole di composizione del duetto furono distrutte e ricreate diverse volte.

E i cantanti che abbiamo costretti a venire nello studio di registrazione? Non è stato poi così difficile una volta che si sono accostati a questi gioielli della lirica! Renée Fleming, Yvonne Kenny, Nelly Miricioiu, Bruce Ford, Rockwell Blake, Jane Eaglen, Majella Cullagh, William Matteuzzi, Diana Montague, Jennifer Larmore, Raul Gimenez, Elizabeth Futral, Alastair Miles, Della Jones: ecco alcuni dei brillanti specialisti di belcanto che hanno risposto alle incantevoli sfide della musica. Sono tutti venuti con piacere nello studio, pronti a dar vita a quella magia mozzafiato che si crea quando due belle voci si uniscono in un duetto.

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Bruce Ford



Nelly  
Miricioiu

[1]

**Gaetano Donizetti**

***Rosmonda d'Inghilterra***

Melodramma serio in two acts

Libretto by Felice Romani

First performance: 27 February 1834

Teatro della Pergola, Florence

Duetto: 'Mi splendeva un serto... Caro, sebben colpevole'

Leonora...Nelly Miricioiu      Enrico...Bruce Ford

Complete recording of *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra* available on ORC13

*ROSMONDA D'INGHILTERRA* was a work of Donizetti's artistic maturity, produced in between *Lucrezia Borgia* (1833) and *Maria Stuarda* (premiered in 1835). It also had a libretto by Felice Romani, the leading practitioner of the genre in Italy at that time, but for all that, it enjoyed small success when staged at the Teatro della Pergola, Florence, on 27 February 1834, and never recovered from its mediocre start. Yet, despite its limited career, its qualities as a work remain exceptional. Working to a plot derived from English history (suitably fictionalised) and centring on the bitter hatred of Eleanor of Aquitaine, wife of Henry II, for his mistress Rosamond Clifford, whom she eventually murders, Donizetti was able to depict the heightened emotions of the characters with particular vividness.

Enrico (Henry II) has begun a serious affair with Rosmonda (Rosamund Clifford), of which his wife Leonora (Eleanor of Aquitaine) has learnt through information passed on by the king's page, Arturo. So great is his infatuation, indeed, that Enrico intends to repudiate his royal wife in Rosmonda's favour.

At the beginning of the second act of the opera, the king's councillors advise him of the likely consequences should he maintain his course of action: Leonora has powerful connections. He will have none of this, and when in the present duet Leonora herself points out that it was through her that he gained the throne, he is equally unmoved. Her subsequent attempt to change his mind by an alternation of loving appeals and direct threats proves no more persuasive.

[2]

**Giovanni Simone Mayr**

***Ginevra di Scozia***

Dramma eroico in two acts

Libretto by Gaetano Rossi

First performance: 28 April 1801

Teatro Nuovo, Trieste

Duetto: 'Che palpiti atroci'

Ginevra...Marilyn Hill Smith      Ariodante...Della Jones

Available on *A Hundred Years of Italian Opera 1800–1810*, ORCH101

REMEMBERED TODAY primarily as the beloved teacher of Donizetti, Giovanni Simone Mayr (1763–1845) had a notably successful career in the opera houses of Italy between 1794 and 1824, and was influential in feeding into the Italian tradition harmonic and orchestral subtleties previously more commonly met with in the German tradition (Mayr was born in Bavaria). Among his 70 or so operas, the work that brought him the greatest acclaim was *Medea in Corinto* (1813) but, throughout his career, he showed a penchant for strong subjects, as in the present example, a work that mines Ariosto's epic *Orlando Furioso* for a plot similar in most essentials to that of Handel's

*Ariodante*. Ginevra, the opera's heroine, has been falsely accused by the malicious Polinesso of unfaithfulness to her betrothed, Ariodante, who is supposed to have drowned himself for grief. Ginevra, meanwhile, is to be executed, when an unknown champion (Ariodante, of course) turns up to fight for her. In this duet, so admired by Stendhal (not normally an enthusiast for Mayr's music), champion and maiden-in-distress – he still believing in her guilt – come close to mutual understanding, but are torn apart again by the signal for combat to begin.

[3]

**Vincenzo Lavigna**

*Honago*

Drama in two acts

Libretto by Gian-Domenico Boggio

First performance: 26 December 1806

Teatro Imperiale, Turin

Duetto: 'Come potrò resistere'

Julda...Della Jones

Elgira...Eiddwen Harthy

Available on *A Hundred Years of Italian Opera 1800–1810*, ORCH101

IF MAYR'S achievement has been overshadowed by that of his brilliant pupil, the situation is even more strikingly repeated in the case of Vincenzo Lavigna (1776–1836), whose name is most often encountered nowadays as the man who taught Verdi counterpoint. The latter appreciated his knowledge and expertise, but an earlier generation knew him as a practitioner of the operatic arts. He composed nine operas between 1802 and 1810, also holding the

important position of *maestro al cembalo* at La Scala from 1802, as well as a teaching post at the Milan Conservatory from 1823.

*Hoango* was later revised as *Orcamo* (La Scala, 1809), but the duet we hear exists only in the first, Turin version of the piece. The setting is ancient China, where Elgira arrives at the court from her Tartar homeland in order to marry the Emperor Hoango. From her point of view the match is unwelcome, since she loves Julda, who has accompanied her on the journey and who is – though neither of them knows this – the rightful heir to the Chinese throne. Before the situation is resolved to provide a *lieta fine*, the two young lovers sing in this graceful duet of their grief at their imminent separation.

[4]

**Giovanni Simone Mayr**

*Medea in Corinto*

Melodramma tragico in two acts

Libretto by Felice Romani

First performance: 28 November 1813

Teatro San Carlo, Naples

Duetto: 'Dove un soave tenero ardore'

Medea...Jane Eaglen      Egeo...Raúl Giménez

Complete recording of *Medea in Corinto* available on ORC11

MAYR'S MASTERPIECE, the two-act opera seria *Medea in Corinto*, written to a libretto by the young Felice Romani, was first presented at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples on 28 November 1813. The setting of the opera is Corinth, where Jason (Giasone) is preparing to wed Creusa, daughter of King Creon

(Creonte), even though he is already married to Medea, the daughter of the king of Colchis, by whom he has two children. Medea's crimes (many of them committed in Giasone's favour) have, however, put her beyond the pale as far as the Greeks are concerned and, at the start of the action, Giasone repels a threatened invasion by Acastes by acceding to his demand that Medea leave the city by nightfall. His own plans to marry Creusa (despite the fact that she is promised to the Athenian King Egeo) are to go ahead. Matters are further complicated by the arrival of Egeo, who, having failed in his attempt to carry Creusa off by force, is thrown into prison. There Medea visits him, gaining entry by magical means, and offers to free him in return for allowing her sanctuary in his own kingdom. Egeo quickly agrees, and the two cement their alliance in a duet of mutual support and desire for vengeance.

The original duet composed by Mayr for the 1813 premiere, however, seems to have been regularly replaced by the one on this disc when the title role was undertaken by Giuditta Pasta, in Paris, London and elsewhere. Its text covers similar ground to Romani's original, while the music was lifted from Mayr's *Adelasia ed Aleramo*, first heard at La Scala in 1806.

[5]

**Gioachino Rossini**

*Otello*

Dramma in three acts

Libretto by (the) Marchese Berio di Salsa

First performance: 4 December 1816

Teatro del Fondo, Naples

Duetto: 'Vorrei, che il tuo pensiero'

Desdemona...Elizabeth Futral      Emilia...Enkelejda Shkosa

Complete recording of *Otello* available on ORC18

THE THIRD of Rossini's operas written for Naples, *Otello* was premiered not at the city's main theatre, the San Carlo (which had burned down) but at the smaller Teatro del Fondo, in 1816. Two years later, Lord Byron happened to see a performance in Venice and complained to his friend, the poet Samuel Rogers in England, of this 'crucifying' of Shakespeare into an Italian opera. Seen from any perspective, however, other than that of literary fidelity to Shakespeare, the work is remarkable on its own terms, based on a libretto by a highly cultivated man of letters, which abounded in opportunities for Rossini to expand the possibilities of the form.

One of its many unusual features is that Desdemona does not appear with the customary formal entrance aria, but in a more intimate conversation with her confidante Emilia, in which she already expresses fears that the interception by her father of a letter she wrote to Otello will incite his jealousy. In this duet (whose final section Rossini borrowed from *Aureliano in Palmira*) Emilia tries to allay Desdemona's anxiety, and the two sing together of the joy and pain of love.

[6]

**Michele Carafa**  
***Gabriella di Vergi***

Azione tragica in two acts

Libretto by Andrea Leone Tottola

First performance: 3 July 1816

Teatro del Fondo, Naples

Duetto: 'Quell' aspetto... quegli accenti'

Raoul...William Matteuzzi    Fayel...Bruce Ford

Available on *William Matteuzzi: Ferme tes yeux...*, ORR216

MICHELE CARAFA (1787–1872) was an aristocrat by birth whose musical studies, begun in Naples, were continued in Paris under Cherubini. In 1808 he joined the army, serving as aide to Napoleon's brother-in-law Joachim Murat, and being decorated with the Légion d'honneur for conspicuous gallantry following the ill-fated Russian expedition of 1812. After the Bourbon restoration he returned to music. His first great success in the opera house came with *Gabriella di Vergi* in 1816, which was announced anonymously as the work of a dilettante. Carafa formed a close friendship with Rossini around this time, a relationship that would continue to the end of the latter's life. Like Rossini, Carafa made a second career in Paris, where he composed some 20 French operas to add to a similar number of Italian ones.

The subject of *Gabriella di Vergi* was later taken up on two separate occasions by Donizetti, and once by Mercadante. Each version deals with the same story, derived from an old French legend. The setting is the castle of Antrei in Burgundy in the 13th century. Believing her beloved Raoul to be dead,



Elizabeth Futral



William Matteuzzi

Gabriella has been forced by her father to marry the cruel Fayel, Count of Vergy. Raoul, however, is very much alive, and turns up early on in the opera, to Gabriella's consternation and Fayel's fury. In this duet, husband and lover face each other down – Raoul's desperate anger roused all the more by Fayel's determination to kill his wife for betraying him – before rushing off to do mortal combat.

[7]

**Gioachino Rossini**  
***Ricciardo e Zoraide***

Drama in two acts

Libretto by (the) Marchese Berio di Salsa

First performance: 3 December 1818

Teatro San Carlo, Naples

Duetto: 'Fu amor propizio'

Ricciardo...William Matteuzzi      Zoraide...Nelly Miricioiu

Complete recording of *Ricciardo e Zoraide* available on ORC14

A PRODUCT of Rossini's Neapolitan period, *Ricciardo e Zoraide* draws its subject from Niccolò Forteguerri's epic poem *Il Ricciardetto*, published in 1738. Remaining in the repertory for some 30 years, it then slept on the shelves until revived at the 1990 Rossini Festival in Pesaro. *Ricciardo* shows Rossini developing and expanding the musical forms of opera seria along innovative lines. In the extract we hear, the short, slow section of a larger duet, the Christian knight Ricciardo has managed, in disguise, to gain admittance to the presence of his beloved Zoraide, held captive by the Nubian king Argorante. At

first scarcely able to believe her eyes, Zoraide soon joins with Ricciardo in praise of love the deceiver, which has aided him in his enterprise.

[8]

**Gioachino Rossini**

***Bianca e Falliero***

Melodramma in two acts

Libretto by Felice Romani

First performance: 26 December 1819

Teatro alla Scala, Milan

Duetto: 'Ciel! Qual destin terrible'

Bianca...Majella Cullagh      Falliero...Jennifer Larmore

Complete recording of *Bianca e Falliero* available on ORC20

DESPITE BEING a mature work, and one granted the honour of opening the 1819–20 season at La Scala, *Bianca e Falliero* remains one of Rossini's least-known major scores today (it has, for instance, never been staged in the UK). The libretto (by Romani) is based on the play *Les Vénitiens, ou Blanche et Montcassin* by Antoine-Vincent Arnault, and is set in Venice during the 17th century, following a time of political uncertainty. To heal one of the republic's internal divisions, former enemies Contareno and Capellio agree to make peace; as a pledge of their new understanding, Contareno's daughter Bianca shall marry Capellio. She, however, is in love with the young general Falliero, whose poverty has ruled him out as a prospective husband as far as her father is concerned. Contareno's announcement of the arranged match with Capellio, therefore, fills Bianca with horror, an emotion reciprocated by her lover, when she appraises him of the situation.



Majella Cullagh



Jennifer Larmore

[9]

**Gaetano Donizetti**  
***Zoraida di Granata***

Melodramma eroico in two acts

Libretto by Bartolomeo Merelli

First performance: 28 January 1822

Teatro Argentina, Rome

Duetto: 'Vorrei punir l'altera'

Almuzir...Bruce Ford    Zoraida...Majella Cullagh

Complete recording of *Zoraida di Granata* available on ORC17

*ZORAIDA DI GRANATA* is an important work in the Donizetti canon, marking as it does the first major success the young composer knew. It was the fifth of his operas to reach the stage, and was composed for a season at the Teatro Argentina in Rome, almost certainly at the suggestion of his teacher, Mayr. It succeeded in impressing local audiences to the extent of being revived in the city two years later. The opera is set in Granada, the capital of Moorish Spain, in the year 1480. Zoraida finds herself the object of a struggle between two men: Almuzir, King of Granada, and his general Abenamet. She herself never wavers in her love for Abenamet, despite the considerable pressure both she and her lover are put under by the all-powerful monarch. In the duet we hear, the tyrannical king, having tried threats and blandishments, admits to himself that his anger has got him nowhere, while Zoraida acknowledges that she is feeling ever more oppressed by Almuzir's unwelcome attentions.

[10]

**Giacomo Meyerbeer**

***Il Crociato in Egitto***

Melodramma eroico in two acts

Libretto by Gaetano Rossi

First performance: 7 March 1824

Teatro la Fenice, Venice

Duetto: 'Ravvisa quell'alma'

Palmide...Yvonne Kenny    Aladino...Della Jones

Complete recording of *Il Crociato in Egitto* available on ORC10

THE FIRST connection that operaphiles make with the name of Meyerbeer is likely to be with the series of grand operas he wrote for the French capital, starting with *Robert le Diable* in 1831 and culminating in the posthumous production of *L'Africaine* in 1865. Prior to this Parisian period, however, the Berlin-born composer had spent nine years (1816–25) in Italy, where his growing success over a sequence of six operas had seen his reputation rise to rival that of Rossini himself. His greatest Italian success came with *Il Crociato in Egitto* (Venice, 1824), an opera quickly taken up internationally. The work's historical importance also lies in its being the last major work to be written for a castrato – Giovanni Battista Velluti created the role of Armando. After the Venetian premiere, he reprised the part in a production in Florence for which Meyerbeer instituted a number of changes, including the replacement of the original aria finale for Armando with the duet for Armando and Palmide, part of which is heard here, and which thereafter became the standard close to the opera.



Yvonne Kenny



Diana Montague

The setting is Damietta (Dumyât) on the coast of Egypt during the 13th century, where the French knight Armando d'Orville has survived the aftermath of a lost battle by disguising himself in the clothes of an Egyptian warrior. Calling himself Elmireno, he has entered the service of the Sultan of Damietta and begun a relationship with the Sultan's daughter, Palmide, which has produced offspring. The arrival of his former beloved Felicia and her uncle, the Grand Master of the Knights of Rhodes, to which order Armando once belonged, on a peace mission, causes many dilemmas and reverses. The Sultan eventually orders the execution of the Christians but, in return, Armando saves the Sultan's life when he is attacked by his own Grand Vizier. In their final duet, Palmide points to Armando's actions as a reason for clemency, and he joins her in her successful plea for mercy and freedom.

[11]

**Carlo Coccia**

*Rosmonda*

Melodramma serio in two acts

Libretto by Felice Romani

First performance: 27 February 1829

Teatro la Fenice, Venice

Duetto: 'Perchè non ho del vento'

Rosmonda... Yvonne Kenny    Arturo... Diana Montague

Available on *A Hundred Years of Italian Opera 1820–1830*, ORCH104

CARLO COCCIA was born in 1782 in Naples and died just short of his 91st birthday in Novara in 1873. As a protégé of Paisiello, and himself a decade older than Rossini, he was generally considered to be on the conservative wing

of Italian music. He spent periods in Lisbon (1820–4) and London (1824–7) before returning to Italy, where the present work saw the light of day in Venice in 1829, and his masterpiece, *Caterina di Guisa*, at La Scala in 1833. He retired from the stage in 1841.

His version of *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra* preceded Donizetti's, and was indeed the original setting of Romani's libretto. We return to an earlier point in the action, when the king's affair has been going on for some time, though Rosmonda remains in blissful ignorance of the actual identity of her lover, whom she knows merely as Edegardo. To keep her hidden away from prying eyes, Enrico has installed her in a tower in the park of Woodstock Castle, while he is away quelling the Irish. To guard Rosmonda, Enrico has provided her with a young page, Arturo, who has complicated the situation by falling in love with her himself. In our extract Rosmonda sits lonely in her tower, singing to her harp of her longing to fly to Enrico's side. From offstage her song is echoed by the equally lovelorn Arturo, and the two then sing together of their respective beloveds.

[12]

**Gaetano Donizetti**

***Anna Bolena***

Libretto by Felice Romani

First performance: 26 December 1830

Teatro Carcano, Milan

Duetto: 'Per vederti invidiata'

Anna...Nelly Miricioiu Percy...Rockwell Blake

Available on *Donizetti Scenes and Overtures*, ORR207

*ANNA BOLENA* marked the turning point of Donizetti's career. An enormous success with the Milanese public at the Teatro Carcano in 1830–1, it brought him undisputed fame and honour in northern Italy as a whole; virtually all of his previous successes had been in either Naples or Rome. It also served to establish him internationally: *Anna Bolena* was soon introduced to audiences in London and Paris, both during 1831, and the work went on to enjoy a lengthy and worldwide career.

Despite the opera's substantial initial success, there was still a feeling in certain quarters that the first act, in particular, could be improved. So, probably during the course of the run, Donizetti seems to have obliged with a number of changes. The most important of these was the replacement of a duet between Anna and Percy with what William Ashbrook has referred to as a 'much more traditional' one, in three sections, of which the second is heard here. The version heard on this disc, however, is not entirely the same as the one described by Ashbrook and analysed in detail by Philip Gossett in his monograph *'Anna Bolena' and the Artistic Maturity of Gaetano Donizetti*. It exists in the form of a

manuscript discovered by Patric Schmid in the Nosedà Collection houses in the Milan Conservatory in the early 1970s.

At this point in the opera, Anna (Anne Boleyn) has been left alone with Richard Percy, her former admirer, whom Henry VIII has arranged to have brought back to England from exile specifically to compromise his wife, thereby presenting him with a ready-made excuse to repudiate her and marry Jane Seymour. Anna is no fool, however, and surmising Henry's plot, pleads with Percy to leave for her sake as well as his. In the section we hear, she counters Percy's proclamation of love for her with a more realistic analysis of their situation.

[13]

**Gaetano Donizetti**

***Rosmonda d'Inghilterra***

Tragedia lirica in two acts

First performance: 27 February 1834

Teatro della Pergola, Florence

Duetto: 'Era, ahì lasso'

Rosmonda... Renée Fleming    Clifford...Alastair Miles

Complete recording of *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra* available on ORC13

SHORTLY AFTER the point in the action of Romani's libretto (whether set by Coccia or, as here, Donizetti) where Rosmonda and Arturo sing their lovelorn, cross-purposes duet, the page tells Rosmonda that she has a visitor – not, as she dearly wishes, Edegaro, but an elderly, much respected knight. At the sound of his name, Clifford, Rosmonda blanches – for it is her father, who has come



Alastair Miles



Mary Plazas

to appeal to Enrico's mistress to give up her liaison with the king, little suspecting that he will address himself to his own daughter. Rosmonda hides her face in her hands at his approach, but when she rises and throws herself at his feet the terrible truth is revealed to him. His initial anger is fierce; it quickly turns to grief, however, as he voices in this duet his sorrow at his daughter's fall from grace while she comments that his wrath is less painful to her than his tears.

[14]

**Giovanni Pacini**

*Maria regina d'Inghilterra*

Tragedia lirica in three acts

Libretto by Leopoldo Tarantini

First performance: 11 February 1843

Teatro Carolino, Palermo

Duetto: 'Qual ora tremenda'

Maria...Nelly Miricioiu Clotilde...Mary Plazas

Complete recording of *Maria regina d'Inghilterra* available on ORC15

THOUGH A far less well-known figure today than his contemporaries Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini, Giovanni Pacini (1796–1867) was a force to reckon with during the middle years, in particular, of a career that spanned 54 years. He was one of the most prolific opera composers of the 19th century, with some 70 works to his credit. But it should not be imagined that he was a thoughtless or hasty creator – in mid-career, between 1835 and 1839, he retired for four years, pondering changing tastes and new developments, and returned to produce a sequence of works more carefully and conscientiously written than hitherto.

To this second period belong *Saffo* (1840), generally regarded as his masterpiece, and *Maria, regina d'Inghilterra*, which won a tremendous success for its composer when premiered in his native Sicily in 1843. The source of the libretto is Victor Hugo's *Marie Tudor*, a fictionalisation of an episode from the reign of Henry VIII's Catholic daughter. The duet we hear is from the final scene of the opera, which seems to have made a profound impact in the theatre. Two condemned men are in the Tower of London – Fenimore, faithless lover of the Queen, and Ernesto, guardian of Clotilde, whom Fenimore had tried to seduce. One man is led off, veiled, to execution – but which? The Queen and Clotilde, in agonies of uncertainty over the victim's identity, join together in anguished concern.

[15]

**Saverio Mercadante**

*Orazi e Curiazi*

Tragedia lirica in three acts

Libretto by Salvatore Cammarano

First performance: 10 November 1846

Teatro San Carlo, Naples

Duetto: 'In fera pugna stanco'

Curiazio...Marcus Jerome    Orazio...Anthony Michaels-Moore

Complete recording of *Orazi e Curiazi* available on ORC12

ONE OF the most interesting figures working in Italian opera in the middle years of the 19th century, Saverio Mercadante (1795–1870) outlined his ideas for operatic reform in a letter written to Francesco Florimo, before the career of Giuseppe Verdi had even got going. Verdi was undoubtedly influenced by

Mercadante, who in the 1830s and 1840s produced a series of strong and imaginatively composed works that were well-received internationally and remained in his native repertoire for decades. One of the most important of these is *Orazi e Curiazi*, which draws on the same basic plot from the early history of Rome as Domenico Cimarosa's long-famous *Gli Orazi ed i Curiazi* of 1796.

During the 7th century BC, the growing conflict between Rome and her neighbour Alba is to be resolved not in all-out battle, but by means of a fight to the death between three warriors chosen from each side. The Orazi brothers will represent Rome, the Curiazi Alba. Such a neat division, however, scarcely does justice to more complex relationships between the two families. Camilla, daughter of the Orazi, had expected to marry Curiazo, son of the Alban enemy family, and her brother Orazio had earlier saved Curiazo's life. As the Orazi brothers pray to their household gods for good fortune, Curiazo enters and, though at first repudiated as an enemy, soon reminds Orazio of their former friendship. Curiazo's moving account of how Orazio saved his life reduces his enemy to tears. As the voices of Roman citizens are heard looking forward to the combat, Orazio and Curiazo embrace and prepare to fight one another to the death.

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David Parry (conductor)