

Semiramide - La Signora Regale

Track listing below review

Arias and Scenes from Porpora to Rossini

Anna Bonitatibus (mezzo)

Accademia degli Astrusi; La Stagione Armonica/Federico Ferri

rec. 19-22 and 25-29 November 2013, Teatro Consorziale, Budrio-BO, Italy. DDD

Texts and translations included

DEUTSCHE HARMONIA MUNDI 88725479862 [44:14 + 53:21]



This is the kind of mezzo 'concept album' more associated with Cecilia Bartoli, except that some who are critical of Bartoli's less authentic way with the Baroque – not something that greatly troubles me – will find Anna Bonitatibus' manner more to their liking. In this case the concept is the operatic treatment of the semi-legendary Queen Semiramis from 1724 to 1828. The title should actually read 'From Caldara to García' because that's the order on the CD. However, Porpora is a little better known than the former and Rossini much better known than the latter, of whom I must admit that I had never heard, though the García dynasty were famous Spanish musicians – Manuel was the first Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville*. Three pieces by Handel, in a pastiche by Leonardo Vinci, Gluck and Salieri are added out of chronological order as bonuses. Even without these the programme would have been slightly too long for a single CD; their inclusion and the budget-price make the 2-CD format for a 97:36 playing time more palatable.

Much of the music recorded here is receiving its first recording: two items even their first-ever performances. I can't say that any of it is outstanding; though all of it is attractive and worth reviving, it's all a bit samey until we reach the Nasolini and Meyerbeer. As the date of composition progresses, so the music becomes ever more coloratura but none of it presents any difficulties for Anna Bonitatibus. She is very well supported vocally where appropriate by La Stagione Armonica, including tenor soloists from the ensemble in the Nasolini (track 10). The period-instrument orchestral support from Accademia degli Astrusi and Federico Ferri's direction are also first-rate.

Only the Rossini aria features in the current UK catalogue, with recordings by Joyce di Donato (Virgin/Erato, all Rossini: Recording of the Month), Renée Fleming (Decca, with Bellini and Donizetti) and Cecilia Bartoli (Decca, *Rossini Heroines*). Not surprisingly, this piece is head and shoulders above everything else on the album and it receives a very fine performance, which should appeal not just to *bel canto* canary-fanciers.

Comparisons are not strictly possible because Bonitatibus sings the original manuscript version of this aria, published as an appendix to the 2001 Critical Edition, with a longer *cavatina* rather than the published shorter *cavatina* followed by a *cabaletta*. There's no denying that Bartoli is stunning in this aria but Bonitatibus gives her such a very good run for her money that I wonder if even the great Colbran, for whom Rossini composed the music, sounded better.

After that the García is less impressive and even the Handel/Vinci *pasticcio* and the Gluck don't quite rise to the level of the Rossini, but both receive excellent performances, as does the Salieri *Sinfonia* which rounds off the second CD in splendid style. I've already sung Anna Bonitatibus's praises in Cavalli (*La Didone* and *Ercole Amante*) and Monteverdi (*Poppea*: Recording of the Month). This recital raises her even higher in my estimation. Perhaps we could now have a Gluck recital from her: on the strength of the second bonus track, that would rival the excellent Bartoli Gluck collection (Decca 4783389).

The recording is very good throughout. Fans of 24-bit sound will find a download in that format as well as in 16-bit, both complete with pdf booklet, at Qobuz.

I understand that the booklet is a limited-edition in its present, *de luxe* illustrated format. Despite its attractions, including details of the legends surrounding Semiramis and very helpful notes about the composers and the music, texts and translations, some of the English is a little unidiomatic. A little more thorough proof-reading would have corrected the information that Semiramis was the *daughter-in-law* of *Salmanassar*. These small niggles apart, a most enjoyable pair of CDs.

Brian Wilson

Track-listing:**Antonio CALDARA (1670-1736)** *Semiramide in Ascalona* (1725)*Introduzione* * [4:22]*Aria Povera navicella** [4:07]**Nicola PORPORA (1686-1768)** *Semiramide Regina dell'Assiria* (1724)*Aria Vanne fido, e al mesto regno** [2:20]**Niccolò JOMMELLI (1714-1774)** *Semiramide Riconosciuta* (1741)*Recitativo e Aria: Barbaro... Tradita, sprezzata* * [5:52]**Andrea BERNASCONI (1706-1784)** *Semiramide* (1765)*Aria Ah non è vano il pianto** [11:05]**Tommaso TRAETTA (1727-1779)** *Semiramide* (1765)*Aria Il pastor se torna aprile** [9:39]

Luca Giardini (violin obbligato)

Giovanni PAISIELLO (1740-1806) *La Semiramide in Villa* (1772)*Aria Serbo in seno il cor piagato** [6:58]**Francesco BIANCHI (1752-1810)** *La Vendetta di Nino* (1790)*Sinfonia* * [4:35]**Giovan Battista BORGHI (1738-1796)** *La Morte di Semiramide* (1791)*Aria Figlio diletto e caro** [5:07]**Sebastiano NASOLINI (1768?-1798?)** *La Morte di Semiramide* (1792)*Recitativo e Aria con coro: Fermati! Il ciel minaccia... Deh sospendi ai pianti miei... Serbo ancora un'alma altera* * [9:41]**Charles-Simon CATEL (1773-1830)** *Sémiramis* (1802)*Dance No.2** [3:28]**Giacomo MEYERBEER (1791-1864)** *Semiramide* (1819)*Recitativo e canzonetta con coro: Più non si tardi... Il piacer, la gioia scenda* [6:31]**Gioachino ROSSINI (1792-1868)** *Semiramide* (1823)*Coro di donne e Cavatina: Serena i vaghi rai... Bel raggio lusinghier** [7:57]**Manuel GARCÍA (1775-1832)** *Semiramis* (1828)*Recitativo e Aria: Già il perfido discese... Al mio pregar t'arrendi** [4:18]

Bonus tracks:

George Frideric HANDEL (1685-1759) *Semiramide riconosciuta* (pastiche by Leonardo Vinci, etc., 1733)*Fuggi dagli occhi miei* [4:14]**Christoph Willibald GLUCK (1714-1787)** *Semiramide riconosciuta* (1748)*Fuggi dagli occhi miei* [3:10]**Antonio SALIERI (1750-1825)** *Semiramide riconosciuta* (1748)*Sinfonia* [4:17]

* world premiere recording