

Amilcare Ponchielli - Marion Delorme (2002)

Written by bluesever

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Disc: 1 1. *Preludio (First Act)* 2. Nr. 1 *Scena e duetto, Marion e Saverny E che? Mentre il bel mondo* 3. Nr. 2 *Recitativo e romanza, Marion Il vil...* 4. Nr. 3 *Scena e duetto, Marion e Didier Mezzanotte e non giunge (Second Act)* 5. Nr. 4 *Scena e terzetto - Finale primo, Marion, Didier e Saverny A me soccorso* 6. Nr. 5 *coro d'introduzione e stoffe non ha che un tempo solo* 7. Nr. 6 *Scena, Saverny Miei cari, vi saluto* 8. Nr. 7 *Scena della sfida e finale secondo Marchese di Saverny ei disse nomarsi* Disc: 2 1. Nr. 8 *Introduzione e scena Venir qui, tel ripeto (Third Act)* 2. Nr. 9 *Scena e canzone, Lelio il campo finalmente* 3. Nr. 10 *Scena e duetto, Marion e Didier Seguirmi volesti* 4. Nr. 11 *Scena ad aria, Saverny Ma dimmi un po'* 5. Nr. 12 *Coro dei comici e finale terzo Circondato e il castel* 6. Nr. 13 *Intermezzo Marcia funebre (Fourth Act)* 7. Nr. 14 *Recitativo e scena, Marion Ecco... son giunta* 8. Nr. 15 *Scena, Marion e Laffemas Alcuno... Lui!* 9. Nr. 16 *Scena ed aria, Marion Tutto quest'uom può dunque?* 10. Nr. 17 *Scena, Didier e Saverny Almen più liberi qui si respira* 11. Nr. 18 *Romanza, Didier Ed or si muoia* 12. Nr. 19 *Scena e duetto, Marion e Didier Badate ad esser lungi* 13. Nr. 20 *Scena e finale ultimo Ah! l'ora scorse* Denia

Mazzola-Gavazzeni (soprano) - Marion Delorme Francisco Casanova (tenor) - Didier Dalibor Jenis (baritone) - Il Marchese di Saverny Carlo Cigni (bass) - Il Signor di Laffemas Franck Bard (bass) - Brichanteau Hervé Martin (bass) - Un capitaine, un géolier Francesca Provvigionato (mezzo-soprano) – Lelio Montpellier Opera Chorus, Latvian Radio Chorus Montpellier National Orchestra Friedemann Layer – conductor

History may have sided with the critics and abandoned a melodrama that was undoubtedly old-fashioned in 1885, but the first audiences at La Scala took Ponchielli's last opera *Marion Delorme* to their hearts. So congratulations to Friedemann Layer for this enterprising concert performance. Enrico Golisciani's libretto must shoulder some of the blame for Marion's brief stage life. Verses hacked out of an unforgiving chunk of history-drama by Victor Hugo adorn a dizzyingly complicated plot that circles a love triangle between the courtesan Delorme, her new young lover Didier and an old flame, the Marquis de Saverny, set at a time when Cardinal Richelieu was the effective ruler of France. Denia Mazzola-Gavazzeni is a magnetic Marion, even when she pushes her voice in uncomfortable directions. And if Francisco Casanova is more a full-throated tenor than a carefully characterised young lover then that's the fault of the

song not the singer. The Verdian echoes that run through this score are quickly forgiven: homage to Aida, Otello and even the great friendship duet for Posa and Carlos in Don Carlos when Didier and Dalibor Jenis's Saverny are on their way to the scaffold for illegal duelling. However, in the last act, Ponchielli is his own musician. The simple funeral march that threads its way through the denouement has the mark of death upon it, and if the verses for the tenor's last aria, 'Silenzio e tenebre', are toe-curlingly awful, this is a composer who could always summon up a good tune when required. The problem was that by the 1880s Verdi had taught the world that it took more than melody to make Italian opera grand. ---Christopher Cook, classical-music.com

My late, lamented colleague, Michael Oliver, would have exulted at the prospect of reviewing this hardly-ever-heard example of verismo, a genre (like so many others) of which he made a speciality. Ponchielli's last opera appears never to have been recorded before, and has received few performances, even in Italy, after its comparatively successful première at La Scala in 1885.

Based on a drama by Victor Hugo (source of so many 19th-century libretti), it is far from being the best plotted of operas. Taking place in 1638 France, dominated by Cardinal Richelieu, it concerns that favourite Romantic figure of the good-hearted demi-mondaine, the Marion of the title, who is greatly loved by the youthful, unhappy Didier, who has no idea of her courtesan past in Paris. Eventually he learns about it and of her numerous lovers, among them the devil-may-care Severny (who eventually goes to the stake with Didier, as a punishment for duelling, outlawed by the Cardinal) and the Scarpia-like Laffemas. As with Tosca and Scarpia, Marion agrees to give herself to him to save Didier, all to no avail.

Largely eschewing the melodramatic gestures and invigorating energy of Gioconda, Ponchielli shows the influence of the school of his French contemporaries in his light, elegant scoring and through the presence of a peripheral, travesty character, Lelio, sung by a mezzo. The work is lop-sided in that the longest, most emotion-laden Act is the fourth and last. There Marion and Didier have finely shaped solos, then a lengthy duet of recrimination with an original structure. Act 1 has a warm romance for the heroine followed by a love duet. All the other characters have solos suited to their characters, Lelio's appropriately light and catchy. There is rather too much anonymous infilling, but enough of merit to make the opera worth investigating, especially to those sated by the regular repertory.

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The performance is a good advertisement for the work. Denia Mazzola-Gavazzeni, widow of the conductor Gianandrea Gavazzeni, pulls out all the stops in portraying Marion's predicament, exploiting to the full a dark chest-register and an exciting top. Casanova has a forward, Italianate production and an attractive manner, with a deal of sensitivity, to make the most of the lovelorn Didier. Jenis's mellow baritone is ideal for Severny. The Italian bass, Carlo Cigni, is a welcome find in an area sparsely populated these days, and he gives a suitably saturnine account of Laffemas' machinations.

Friedemann Layer presides over all with a refined ear for the keen scoring and for keeping the drama on the move. He is particularly good in the concertato (large ensemble) that closes Act 3. The recording, though a shade confined, is adequate enough for anyone to enjoy this welcome newcomer to the catalogue. ---Alan Blyth, gramophone.co.uk

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