

Saverio Mercadante - Il Bravo (2005)

Written by bluesever

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CD1 01. Atto 1 - Steso ha già propizia notte 02. Atto 1 - Della vita nel sentier [play](#) 03. Atto 1 - A te mio suolo ligure 04. Atto 1 - Ancor giovane e proscritto 05. Atto 1 - Viva il Doge

CD2

01. Atto 2 - Tu che d'un guardo penetri 02. Atto 2 - Dal dì che sei fuggita 03. Atto 2 - Ei torna- Ebben ritratti 04. Atto 2 - Finale 2- Viva, Viva La Fata, L' Armida

CD3

01. Atto 3 - Nell'orror trascinata 02. Atto 3 - Se fede vuoi richiedere

[play](#)

03. Atto 3 - Segreti, quai spettri tacenti

Il Bravo - Dino Di Domenico Teodora - Adelisa Tabladon Violetta - Janet Perry Pisani - Sergio Bertocchi Foscari - Stefano Antonucci Cappelio - Leonardo de Lisi Marco - Ambrogio Riva Luigi - Giuseppe de Matteis Michelina - Maria Cristina Zanni Coro Filarmonico di Bratislava Orchestra Internazionale d'Italia Bruno Aprea - conductor, 1991

This recording has appeared in various incarnations as both 2 and 3 disc sets, but invariably with an Italian libretto and an English synopsis - which is welcome but to some degree irrelevant as the plot is so absurdly convoluted and cliché-ridden that it makes "Il Trovatore" (which Mercadante tried to suppress!) appear a model of clarity and restraint. It has a number of narrative similarities to "Simon Boccanegra", relying upon knowledge of events preceding curtain-up and the customary forbidden loves and paternity revelations. It is nonetheless a curiosity of considerable interest to a moderately curious and experienced opera-lover without really being the masterpiece that some previous reviewers claim.

Its first appearance in 1839 created quite a stir; Mercadante was not to know that his long decline in popularity would simultaneously date from about this time, especially as he continued to enjoy success with much later works such as "Virginia". Verdi was in the ascendant, and although Mercadante pressed on with the new realism of his "reform" operas, his style still appears retrospective and retrograde compared with the younger composer's innovations -

more akin to Donizetti than Verdi. Not that there's anything wrong with good Donizetti...but Mercadante never quite got over being yesterday's man.

Verdi nonetheless esteemed him and even put him top of the list to contribute to the original Rossini Requiem that never materialised. There is much of considerable drama and beauty in this carefully crafted score, not least a lovely, plangent, extended duet for mother and daughter at the start of Act 3. I was first drawn to this recording by noticing in the cast Stefano Antonucci, whose neat, vibrant baritone contributes so pleasingly to another Nuova Era live rarity in my possession, Puccini's "Le Villi" (see my review). There are other good singers in the cast, too, particularly Dino Di Domenico, whose sappy lyric tenor makes light of a high tessitura and is able to summon up a bit of steel when required. He contrasts well with another tenor, one Sergio Bertocchi, who is a good musician but whose tenor is too cloudy and occluded to be leading man. He also has tendency to under-the-note intonation which I suspect is the product of imperfect voice production. A certain flatness and some erratic control above the stave afflicts soprano Adelina Tabaldon, too, though she is very committed, even if the role really needs a fuller, beefier sound. Her daughter Violetta is well sung by one-time Karajan favourite Janet Perry, who uses her light lyric soprano sensitively, deploying a fine trill and serving as a foil to her stage-mother.

There aren't many solo arias in this piece but plenty of duets and ensembles; in addition to the soprano duet I mentioned previously I would draw your attention to a the tenor duet in Act 1, which first exploits a cantilena melody Verdi might have been proud of and then moves into a dramatic confrontation. Mercadante was a gifted melodist and a scrupulous composer who insisted that his performers adhere closely to his score in order to ensure that the pacing and effects he had devised came off; he was a real craftsman even if he hadn't Verdi's dramatic instincts.

Bruno Aprea secures good ensemble for a live performance and the Orchestra Internazionale d'Italia is a very able band, used to performing a diverse repertoire in festivals. The sound is surprisingly good for a live recording; some fading in and out but not too much stage noise such that one is rarely distracted or irritated. --- Ralph Moore "Ralph operaphile" (Bishop's Stortford, UK), amazon.com

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