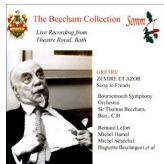


Andre Gretry – Zemire et Azor (Beecham) [2011]

Written by bluesever

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CD1 1 Act I: Overture 5:20 2 Act I Scene 1: Dialogue: Ariette: L'orage va cesser (Ali) 3:13 3 Act I Scene 1: Dialogue: Que dis-tu? L'orage redouble (Sander, Ali) 0:16 4 Act I Scene 1: Air: Le malheur me rend intrepide (Sander) 2:38 5 Act I Scene 1: Oh! moi, qui n'eus jamais d'autre bien que ma vie (Ali) 1:23 6 Act I Scene 1: Ariette: Les esprits, dont on nous fait peur 2:05 7 Act I Scene 1: Dialogue: Ali, pour le coup, est un homme.. (Sander) 0:11 8 Act I Scene 1: Duet: Le temps est beau (Sander, Ali) 3:51 9 Act I Scene 2: Dialogue: Allons, ma famille m'attend (Sander, Ali) 1:43 10 Act I Scene 2: Air: La pauvre enfant ne savait pas (Sander) 4:16 11 Act I Scene 2: Dialogue: J'ai l'ame assez compatissante (Azor, Sander) 1:09 12 Act I Scene 2: Air: Ne va pas me tromper (Azor) 3:46 13 Act I Scene 2: Finale: Symphoie qui exprime le vol du nuage 0:58 14 Act II Scene 1: Trio: Veillons mes soeurs (Zemire, Fatme, Lisbe) 4:43 15 Act II Scene 2: Dialogue: Ah mon pere! Quelle joie (Zemire, Fatme, Lisbe) 1:07 16 Act II Scene 2: Ariette: Rose cherie (Zemire) 2:50 17 Act II Scene 3: Dialogue: Vous avez veille toute la nuit (Sander, Ali, Zemire) 2:29 18 Act II Scene 3: Recitative: Je vais faire encore un voyage (Sander) 1:58 19 Act II Scene 3: Duet: Je veux le voir; je veux lui dire (Zemire, Ali) 3:37
CD2

1 Act III Scene 1: Air: Ah! quel tourment d'etre sensible (Azor) 5:20 2 Act III Scene 1: Cruelle fee, abrege ou ma vie, ou ma peine (Azor) - Scene 2:... 2:27 3 Act III Scene 2: Duet: Rassure mon pere (Zemire, Ali) 3:30 4 Act III Scene 2: Dialogue: Esclave, éloigne-toi (Azor, Ali) 0:28 5 Act III Scene 2: Entree des genies 3:24 6 Act III Scene 2: Allegro (Passepied) 1:56 7 Act III Scene 2: Airs de ballet 4:29 8 Act III Scene 5: Dialogue: O ciel! (Zemire, Azor) 1:01 9 Act III Scene 5: Air: Du moment qu'on aime (Azor) 4:10 10 Act III Scene 5: Dialogue: Helas, je ne puis revenir (Zemire, Azor) 1:14 11 Act III Scene 5: Air: La fauvette, avec ses petits (Zemire) 6:52 12 Act III Scene 5: Dialogue: Vos chants pour moi sont (Azor, Zemire) 0:28 13 Act III Scene 6: Dialogue: Helas! comme il est triste! (Zemire, Azor) - Trio: Ah!... 3:27 14 Act III Scene 7: Dialogue: Ah! cruel! (Zemire, Azor) 1:38 15 Act III Scene 7: N'oubliez pas celui qui vous attend (Azor) - Larghetto 0:57 16 Act III Scene 7: Entr'acte 2:07 17 Act IV Scene 1: Ariette: J'en suis encor tremblant (Ali) 2:18 18 Act IV Scene 2: Dialogue: Volia ma soeur (Fatme, Lisbe, Sander) 1:24 19 Act IV Scene 2: Quartet: Ah! je tremble (Zemire, Sander, Fatme, Lisbe) 4:29 20 Act IV Scene 3: Air: Le soleil s'est cache dans l'onde (Azor) 5:22 21 Act IV Scene 3: Air: Azor! Azor! en vain ma voix l'appelle (Zemire) 5:24 22 Act IV Scene 5: Dialogue: Zemire! - Scene 6: Dialogue: Mon pere! Me soeurs!... 1:10 23 Act IV Scene 6: Final: Amour, amour (All) 1:15 24 Act IV Scene 6: Le ballet termine le spectacle. Reprise de Passepied 1:43

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Sander, A Merchant: Bernard Lefort (Baritone) Ali, His Servant: Michel Hamel (Tenor) Azor, A Fearsome Beast: Michel Sénéchal (Tenor) Zémire: Huguette Boulangeot (Soprano) Fatmé: Arda Mandikian (Soprano) Lisbé: Claire Duchesneau (Soprano) The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra Sir Thomas Beecham - conductor Live broadcast performance: Bath, 1955

The operas of Grétry are seldom recorded, and even less often performed, today. The composer was for a time the personal director of music to Marie-Antoinette and there is a strong vein of pretty artificiality which can seem at best trivial in unsympathetic hands. The present recording is certainly not in such hands as Beecham had a particular liking for the music of Grétry and his contemporaries. It was presumably at his behest that this opera was chosen as part of the programme for the 1955 Bath Festival. The present issue derives from a set of private recordings on 78rpm acetates of a live broadcast of one of a series of five performances of the work.

The plot a merchant ruined by a shipwreck who seeks refuge in the house of a Prince transformed into a beast by an evil fairy. The merchant takes a rose from the Prince's garden, and in return for this theft is condemned to sacrifice his life to the beast. One of his daughters offers her own life instead, but comes to realise that the beast - the Prince - is in fact gentle in his intentions towards her. Her sacrifice returns the Prince to his human form. If a story of sacrifice reminds you of Idomeneo or Jephtha this would be misleading, as there is little exploration of the complex human relations involved. Instead we have a delightful series of beautifully worked airs, ensembles and dance movements - including the gentle Airs de ballet which Beecham played frequently outside the opera. The result may not be Mozartian, although it is close to *Les Petits Riens*, but is extremely beautiful, diverting and concise. It is easy to understand what attracted Beecham to it.

Although the sound, as re-mastered by Gary Moore and Arthur Ridgwell, is adequate for its age and origin some creative listening is required but most listeners will find it tolerable. There are cuts and changes to the text in Beecham's edition and inevitably the performance style is that of its time. I have no doubt that a modern historically informed performance would sound very different but I am also in no doubt as to the sheer beauty and character of the sounds and approach found here. It helps immensely that most of the singers are French, especially as there is spoken dialogue between most of the numbers. This is however not too extensive and the booklet includes the entire libretto with an English translation by Andrew Parker.

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The result is a delightful experience which should attract not just admirers of the conductor but also those interested in this important but underrated composer. If you do not know his music it is worth sampling these discs. I would be surprised if they do not give considerable pleasure. ---
John Sheppard, MusicWeb International

This is a most delightful release, and an instructive one—a live BBC recording of a performance of Grétry's 'Beauty and the Beast' opera in May 1955 at the Theatre Royal, Bath. Beecham's affinity with 19th-century French music is well known, but while in Paris during the early 1900s he studied, and seriously studied, 18th-century opéra comique, and his understanding of—and sympathy with—the genre shines through in this enchanting performance.

Grétry's idiom has in the past been considered rather primitive, but his was an art that concealed art, simple, almost naïve on the surface but with many a hidden depth. Beecham catches to a tee both the surface charm and the less obvious compositional skill lying behind it. As the informative booklet notes admit, he 'edited and arranged' the score. Orchestral textures are filled out; just one number is cut, and there are internal snips within other numbers that one shouldn't get too worried about—Grétry could be over-generous with repeats. Anyway, there are precedents: Adolphe Adam re-orchestrated the whole piece in the 19th century.

Beecham draws alert, pointed and disciplined playing from the Bournemouth orchestra and emphasizes the work's swiftly changing moods. Much of it was very funny, to judge from the (unobtrusive) audience laughter, and the producer Anthony Besch obviously hit the mark, as he did with his later staging at the Camden Festival in 1980.

The sound has been brilliantly engineered, forward and ideally clear. The cast is remarkable and provides a demonstration of how French artists sang in those days—off the words and with clean-toned precision. Bernard Lefort, of course, went on to bigger things, but he was a first-rate baritone. The young Michel Sénéchal is in beautifully fresh voice and delivers some succulent soft passages—he was still singing nearly 50 years later. Huguette Boulangeot's soprano tone is rather 'white', but she is very musical and has all the notes, up to a top D. Arda Mandikian, no less, sings Fatmé very sweetly, and with warmer sound.

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One of the delights of the set is the spoken dialogue, taken at a fair lick and eliciting much of the laughter, thanks mainly to Michel Hamel's Ali, as wittily sprightly in song as in speech. The French dialogue text and English translation are included in the booklet. Most warmly recommended. --- Rodney Milnes, opera.co.uk

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