

Ann Hallenberg - Arias for Marietta Marcolini [2012]

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1. Johann Simon Mayr - *Sol Di Morte Nero Velo* 2. Gioacchino Rossini - *Se Per Te Lieta Ritorno* 3. Joseph Weigl - *Dille Che in Lei Rispetto* 4. Ferdinando Paer - *Io Morro* 5. Giuseppe Mosca - *Mentre Guardo, Oh Diot Me Stessa* 6. Gioacchino Rossini - *Per Lui Che Adoro* 7. Gioacchino Rossini - *Pensa Alla Patria, E Intrepido* 8. Carlo Coccia - *Tu Mi Stringi* 9. Gioacchino Rossini - *T'abbraccio, Ti Stringo* Ann Hallenberg - soprano Stavanger Symphony Orchestra and Chamber Choir Fabio Biondi - conductor

Marietta Marcolini was an Italian contralto born in Florence in 1780. Rossini's career would not have taken flight in so meteoric a fashion without a series of providential encounters, and that with Marietta Marcolini was to leave an indelible stamp on his entire output. By creating roles to measure for her, as in 'La pietra del paragone' and 'L Italiana in Algeri', and exploiting this interpreter's uncommon resources more fully than had other composers before him, Rossini ushered in the fashion for a new type of comedy, the brilliant, virtuoso comedy of which he was to remain the master until 'Le Comte Ory' (1828). Unlike the numerous recorded recitals devoted exclusively to Rossini, this one presents the young Rossini in the context of the Italian musical theatre of the second decade of the 19th century. Included are extremely well-known arias like the spectacular rondo from 'L Italiana' and that of 'L equivoco stravagante', the original version of Clarice's rondo in 'La pietra del paragone'. It also reveals also the richness and variety of the pre-Rossinian composers are forgotten today. The Swedish mezzo-soprano Ann Hallenberg has become established as one of Europe's leading mezzosopranos. Her operatic repertoire includes a large number of roles by Rossini, Mozart, Gluck, Massenet, Handel, Vivaldi and Monteverdi. Equally at home on the concert platform, she frequently appears in concert halls and festivals throughout Europe and North America. With this recording, NAIVE launches a new series of CDs called NAIVE DISCOVERIES, which will assemble our enthusiasm for rare repertoires, atypical projects, releases distinct from signings of exclusive artists or production contracts spread over several years. ---amazon.com

The lives of the singers who appeared on opera stages in the early 19th century are gradually coming to light. One of them, Marietta Marcolini, is described here as Gioachino Rossini's first muse, but other researchers have described such figures as creative contributors to the opera of the period, which had a substantial improvisational component. That comes through on this release, which gives Swedish mezzo soprano Ann Hallenberg plenty of room to stretch out into ornate decoration. The program includes a few familiar Rossini arias, but Marcolini was famous before she ever met the young Rossini, and the primary innovation here is the collection of arias from the almost totally neglected period of Italian opera between Mozart's death and Rossini's rise to prominence. The arias by Johann Simon Mayr, Giuseppe Mosca, Carlo Coccia, and others are mostly big pieces, drawn from among section finales and the like, and they show the development of style in Rossini and even more so in his successors as a process of simplification; they are multisectional pieces with plenty of fire. Both she and conductor Fabio Biondi have backgrounds in the historical performance of Baroque vocal music, but they don't try to apply techniques from their performances of music from that period here. Biondi in particular avoids the explosive style of his Baroque performances in favor of smooth, self-effacing readings that put the emphasis squarely on the singer. And Hallenberg steps up: her voice is not massive, but the agility is right for this music, and her vision of how the two arias from Rossini's *L'italiana in Algeri* would have sounded in their own time is lively and charismatic. They get excellent support from Naïve's engineers, working in Frank Gehry's Stavanger Concert Hall in Norway; it doesn't look as though it would make a good stand-in for a medium-sized Italian opera house of the early 19th century, but it does. ---James Manheim, Rovi

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