

Samuel Barber – Vanessa (1958)

Written by bluesever

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CD1 1. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act I: Potage crème aux perles* [play](#) 2. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act I: No, I cannot understand* 3. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act I: Must the winter come so soon?* 4. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act I: Listen!...They are here...* 5. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act I: Do not utter a word, Anatol* 6. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act I: Yes, I believe I shall love you* 7. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act I: Who are you?* 8. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act II: And then? - He Made me drink* 9. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act II: No, you are not as good a skater* 10. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act II: 'Under the willow tree...'* 11. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act II: Erika, I am so happy* 12. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act II: Our arms entwined* 13. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act II: Did you hear her?* 14. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act II: Outside this house the world has changed* 15. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act II: Orchestral Interlude - Hymn*

CD 2 1.

Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act III: The Count and Countess d'Albany 2. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act III: I should never have been a doctor* 3. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act III: Here you are!* 4. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act III: At last I found you* 5. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act III: Nothing to worry about* 6. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act IV, Scene 1: Why did no one warn me?* 7. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act IV, Scene 1: Why must the greatest sorrows* 8. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act IV, Scene 1: There, look!* 9. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act IV, Scene 1: Anatol, tell me the truth!* 10. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act IV, Scene 1: Take me away* 11. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act IV, Scene 1: Grandmother! - Yes, Erika* 12. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act IV, Scene 1: Intermezzo* 13. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act IV, Scene 2: By the time we arrive* 14. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act IV, Scene 2: And you, my friend* 15. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act IV, Scene 2: To leave, to break (Quintet)* 16. *Vanessa, opera, Op. 32: Act IV, Scene 2: Goodbye, Erika*

[play](#)

Vanessa - Eleanor Steber Erika - Rosalind Elias Old Baroness - Regina Resnik Anatol - Nicolai Gedda Old Doctor - Giorgio Tozzi Nicolas - George Cehanovsky Footman - Robert Nagy Metropolitan Opera Chorus and Orchestra Dimitri Mitropoulos, 1958

This may be one of the greatest American operas of all time. It is shocking that a work of this

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quality isn't more widely performed. It is a vocal showcase.

Vanessa suffers perhaps from a bit overwrought libretto. Menotti is guilty of his usual excesses. But Barber more than makes up for this in the sweep of his melodies. Musically, the piece is tonal, but harmonically adventurous. Interestingly, some of the piece calls to mind composers such as Bernard Herrmann or Miklas Rosza...high praise indeed for dramatic music in my mind. The final quintet at the end of the fourth act is rapturous. I find myself listening to it again and again.

The performance is as close to perfect as a composer could wish for. Steber is brilliant as Vanessa and Rosalind Elias is a moving Erika. Mitropoulos conducts with sweep and power. I wish opera companies would revive this work. It really deserves it. ---Christopher Forbes

There are only a few of what I would call "perfect" opera recordings. I can happily add Barber's Vanessa to that list. Steber's performance leaves one shaking one's head wondering why she hadn't made more recordings. Hers is that rare combination of pure beauty of tone, perfect technique, dramatic flair, unfailing musicianship, power, and range. Why do we have so little of her on disc? She gives the performance of a lifetime as the title role. That isn't to say the rest of the cast isn't on the same level. Amazingly, Rosalind Elias as Erika almost steals the scenes away from Steber. Her mezzo is rich yet youthful sounding, dramatically and musically as fresh as Steber. The two together is magic. Gedda impresses as Anatol, his English pronunciation is superb. Tozzi is in glorious voice and delivers with relish. That leaves Mitropoulos to conduct with brilliance, savoring Barber's bejewelled score with every stroke of his baton. It's a wonderful score, brilliantly written.

The libretto is a bit too kitschy, but no more than any Verdi opera. The sound, even from the 1950's, is clear and fresh, putting some "modern" recordings to shame. I would get this set while it's still available. There is no wonder why it was only recorded once--there's no reason to record it again. ---Daniel Mitrano

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Vanessa is an opera in three (originally four) acts by Samuel Barber with an original English libretto by Gian-Carlo Menotti. It was composed in 1956–1957 and was first performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City on January 15, 1958 under the baton of Dimitri Mitropoulos in a production designed by Cecil Beaton and directed by Menotti. Barber revised the opera in 1964, reducing the four acts to the three-act version most commonly performed today.

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