

Vincenzo Bellini – Norma (Bonyngge) [1990]

Written by bluesever

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CD1 1. Norma: Sinfonia 2. Norma: Act One - Scene 1: Introduzione - Ite sul colle, o Druidi (Oroveso) 3. Norma: Act One - Scene 1: Svanir le voci! (Pollione) 4. Norma: Act One - Scene 1: Meco all'altar di Venere (Pollione) 5. Norma: Act One - Scene 1: Me protegge, me difende (Pollione) 6. Norma: Act One - Scene 1: Norma viene (Coro) 7. Norma: Act One - Scene 1: Sediziose voci, voci di guerra (Norma) 8. Norma: Act One - Scene 1: Casta Diva (Norma) 9. Norma: Act One - Scene 1: Fine al rito (Norma) 10. Norma: Act One - Scene 1: Ah! bello a me ritorna (Norma) 11. Norma: Act One - Scene 1: Sgombra e la sacra selva (Adalgisa) 12. Norma: Act One - Scene 1: Deh! proteggimi, o Dio! (Adalgisa) 13. Norma: Act One - Scene 1: Eccola! va, mi lascia, ragion non odo (Pollione) 14. Norma: Act One - Scene 1: Va, crudele, al Dio spietato (Pollione) CD2 1. Norma: Act 1- Scene 2: Vanne, e li ceta entrambi (Norma) 2. Norma: Act 1- Scene 2: Adalgisa! (Norma) 3. Norma: Act 1- Scene 2: Oh! rimembranza! (Norma) 4. Norma: Act 1- Scene 2: Ah! si, fa core, abbracciami (Norma) 5. Norma: Act 1- Scene 2: Ma di', l'amato quale fra noi si noma? (Norma) 6. Norma: Act 1- Scene 2: Oh non tremare (Norma) 7. Norma: Act 1- Scene 2: Oh! di qual sei tu vittima (Norma) 8. Norma: Act 1- Scene 2: Oh! qual traspare orribile (Adalgisa) 9. Norma: Act 1- Scene 2: Norma! de' tuoi rimproveri (Pollione) 10. Norma: Act 1- Scene 2: Perfido! (Norma) 11. Norma: Act 1- Scene 2: Vanne, si: mi lascia, indegno (Norma) CD3 1. Norma: Act Two - Scene 1: Scena Introduzione 2. Norma: Act Two - Scene 1: Dormono entrambi (Norma) 3. Norma: Act Two - Scene 1: Mi chiami, o Norma! (Adalgisa) 4. Norma: Act Two - Scene 1: Deh! con te, con te li prendi (Norma) 5. Norma: Act Two - Scene 1: Mira, o Norma (Adalgisa) 6. Norma: Act Two - Scene 1: Si, fino all'ore estreme (Norma, Adalgisa) 7. Norma: Act Two - Scene 2: Non parti? (Coro dei guerrieri) 8. Norma: Act Two - Scene 2: Guerrieri! a voi venirne (Oroveso) 9. Norma: Act Two - Scene 3: Ei tornera (Norma) 10. Norma: Act Two - Scene 3: Squilla il bronzo del Dio! (Coro) 11. Norma: Act Two - Scene 3: Guerra, guerra! (Norma) 12. Norma: Act Two - Scene 3: Ne compri il rito, o Norma? (Oroveso) 13. Norma: Act Two - Scene 3: In mia man alfin tu sei (Norma) 14. Norma: Act Two - Scene 3: Gia mi paso ne' tuoi sguardi (Norma) 15. Norma: Act Two - Scene 3: Dammi quel ferro (Pollione) 16. Norma: Act Two - Scene 3: Qual cor tradisi, qual cor perdesti (Norma) 17. Norma: Act Two - Scene 3: Norma! deh! Norma, scolpati! (Oroveso, Coro) 18. Norma: Act Two - Scene 3: Deh! non volerli vittime (Norma)

Joan Sutherland – soprano Marilyn Horne – mezzo soprano Yvonne Minton – mezzo soprano
John Alexander - tenor Richard Cross - bass Joseph Ward - tenor London Symphony
Orchestra Richard Bonyngge - conductor

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Joan Sutherland is beyond praise in this definitive recording of Norma. Her singing makes all the other Normas obsolete (Callas, Caballe, Ponselle). Only Sutherland sings the arias and duets in their original keys. Callas and Ponselle say that Norma is their most difficult role, yet they sing everything one FULL note lower than what was originally written. That is ridiculous! Imagine the Immolation Scene from Gotterdammerung transposed one note down. Or how about transposing Nessun Dorma from Turandot one note down. The result, of course is that it loses most of its excitement. Now imagine all of Norma's arias and duet one note up, the way it's supposed to be sung...the way Sutherland sings it here and during her prime on actual stage performances (note: even Sutherland transposed Norma's music down in her later years, ie the late 1970's and 1980's). Norma in the original keys is beyond the reach of Caballe and certainly Callas, but not for Sutherland and Horne, they had a field day with the higher keys! Listen to this Norma and you'll be amazed at Sutherland and Horne's showmanship and artistry.

---amazon.com

I believe this is the only note-complete performance of this opera, and furthermore, the only one that is sung in all of the original keys (in almost every other recording "Casta diva" and the duets are transposed down). It is a spectacular example of bel canto. Recorded in 1964, Joan Sutherland was at her peak, exhibiting fearless, beautiful singing, thoroughly accurate in fiorature and breath control, and, for Sutherland, dramatically telling. Her usually dreadful diction is somewhat better than elsewhere, and she presents Norma's unhappiness and acceptance of her fate honestly. She's not as good when she must express anger, but she tries very hard, and in the face of such gorgeous singing, one barely minds. Of course she never comes near Callas in psychological depth, but why bother bringing that up?

Marilyn Horne is a spectacular Adalgisa, her tone and technique stunning, her word painting sincere and telling, and her legendary blending with Sutherland nowhere more remarkable. John Alexander was a fine tenor and he presents a strong Pollione, but he never sounds Italian and the music suffers. Richard Cross is too light for Orovoso's pronouncements, but Yvonne Minton is a fine Clotilde. Richard Bonyngge's leadership at this stage of his career consisted of listening to and following his wife; he gets little tension from the score but it's played well. Fans of Sutherland and Horne must own this--perhaps everyone should, just to hear how the music is supposed to sound--but opera lovers will need a Callas performance first and foremost.

---Robert Levine, ClassicsToday.com

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