Arrigo Boito – Mefistofele (Fabriitis) (2006)

CD1 *1. Mefistofele / Prologue - Preludio 5:38 2. Mefistofele / Prologue - Ave, Signor degli angeli e dei santi! 3:59 3. Mefistofele / Prologue - Ave Signor! 4:07 4. Mefistofele / Prologue - T'è noto Faust? 3:03 5. Mefistofele / Prologue - Siam nimbi volanti dai limbi 2:11 6. Mefistofele / Prologue - Salve Regina! 6:22 7. Mefistofele / Act 1 - Perchè di là? 4:29 8. Mefistofele / Act 1 - Al soave raggiar di primavera 5:15 9. Mefistofele / Act 1 - Sediam sovra quel sasso 6:33 10. Mefistofele / Act 1 - Dai campi, dai prati 3:18 11. Mefistofele / Act 1 - Che baccano! 1:22 12. Mefistofele / Act 1 - Sono lo spirito che nega 4:48 13. Mefistofele / Act 1 - Se tu mi doni un'ora di riposo 3:53 14. Mefistofele / Act 2 - Cavaliero illustre e saggio 5:20 15. Mefistofele / Act 2 - Dimmi se credi, Enrico 4:54 16. Mefistofele / Act 2 - Dio clemente, nuova, ignara 1:57*
CD2
1. Mefistofele / Act 2 - Su, cammina, cammina, cammina (La notte del sabba) 2:56 2. Mefistofele / Act 2 - Folletto 1:23 3. Mefistofele / Act 2 - Ascolta! 3:29 4. Mefistofele / Act 2 - Popoli! E scettro e clamide 2:35 5. Mefistofele / Act 2 - Ecco il mondo 5:50 6. Mefistofele / Act 2 - Ah! su! riddiamo, riddiamo 3:39 7. Mefistofele / Act 3 - L'altra notte in fondo al mare 7:48 8. Mefistofele / Act 3 - Dio di pietà! son essi! 5:25 9. Mefistofele / Act 3 - Lontano, lontano, lontano 2:51 10. Mefistofele / Act 3 - Sorge il dì 2:01 11. Mefistofele / Act 3 - Spunta l'aurora pallida 3:43 12. Mefistofele / Act 4 - La luna immobile 3:59 13. Mefistofele / Act 4 - Ecco la notte del classico Sabba 2:35 14. Mefistofele / Act 4 - Danza 2:18 15. Mefistofele / Act 4 - Ah! Trionfi ad Elena 1:01 16. Mefistofele / Act 4 - Notte cupa, truce 3:58 17. Mefistofele / Act 4 - Forma ideal, purissima 3:39 18. Mefistofele / Act 4 - O incantesimo! parla! parla! 5:54 19. Mefistofele / Epilogue - Cammina, cammina ... 4:56 20. Mefistofele / Epilogue - Giunto sul passo estremo 5:17 21. Mefistofele / Epilogue - Ave Signor, Signor degli angeli 3:30
Montserrat Caballé – soprano Mirella Freni – soprano Nucci Condo – mezzo-soprano Della Jones - mezzo-soprano Nicolai Ghiaurov – bass Robin Leggate – tenor Piero de Palma – tenor Luciano Pavarotti – tenor London Opera Chorus Trinity Boys Choir National Philharmonic Orchestra Oliviero de Fabritiis - conductor

This clearly underrated opera is at last given fair justice in the CD catalogue. For, with this specific recording at this price, one needs no longer hesitate, this is now the top recommendation.

It's primary strengths are the conducting of Maestro de Fabritiis and the Faust of Pavarotti. de Fabritiis here manages, unlike for example, Serafin and Rudel, to achieve a great sounding whole performance, of a piece in which there is always the risk of just presenting many great sounding numbers/moments in a row. The spaciousness in tempi may not appeal all, but it largely contribute to the feeling of a spirited whole. The only conductor to partially present a threat to de Fabritiis is in my opinion the almost totally unknown Ivan Marinov on a hard to find recording from the Bulgarian State opera on the Capriccio label. Marinovs singers though, are less notable, although the "lontano, lontano" duet is the best I've ever heard, and the coro of the prologue is just - heavenly. That recording has some flaws though, but at half the price of this, still a good bargain for those on a budget.

Pavarotti, not always one of my favorite tenors, is in glorious voice and presents the true poetry of Faust's character and music. His 'Dai campi', the second act duet with Margerita on believing (or not) in religion, the duet with Elena beginning with "Notte cupa, truce", and the "Giunto sul passo estremo" just before the closing of the opera are just a few mentioned highlights of a great performance. Where Domingo (normally my choice before Pavarotti) for Rudel sounds totally uniform and bland, Pavarotti expresses. And where del Monaco for Serafin is rather hard on the border to coarse, Pavarotti is thoughtful. The only tenor to make a portrayal that comes in the class of Pavarotti's is di Stefano, also for Serafin (but only as highlights of the opera).

Ghiaurov's Devil is rather noble and well-sounding, compared to for example Treigle (Rudel) or Christoff (Gui). Lacking something of pure evil, as you find in Christoff (Gui), Siepi (Serafin) and Ramey (Muti), he still is mightily impressive. Freni is as always, well inside her role and beautiful in voice, which naturally also goes for the luxury casting of Caballe as Elena - Her duet with Pavarotti is especially fine. The rest of the cast is very good, and it's nice to hear Piero de Palma sing the role of Wagner again, as he did 25 years earlier on the Serafin/Siepi/Tebaldi/del Monaco set, still sounding fresh and urgent.

The rivals then? Well, if thinking of this as a showcase for a bass, I must say Siepi (Serafin) and Christoff (Gui) are the best - good fun, and both have darker voices, preferable in a opera such as this. Ramey (Muti) is also good fun, but he's almost the only listenable singer in that set. Ghiaurov is not the first choice devil, nor in timbre, nor in character, but his voice and projection is first class, none the less.

As for the ladies, Freni also has stiff competition, in Tebaldi (Serafin) & Caballé (Rudel) primarily. Her greatest point is in presenting a woman more obviously troubled than both

Caballé and Tebaldi - the former almost too sweet, the latter slightly detached though beautiful on the ear. Fans of either of the women will like their special performances. Having all, I slightly prefer Freni. Caballé though, has no match in the catalogue as Elena, with her magically spun tone.

So this set has 3 top of the list performances from it's leads, and the most fluent & sensitive conducting. So, only if the Devil's role is of the greatest importance to you, you might want to look elsewhere, even though you wouldn't go far wrong with Ghiaurov. As for myself, this set is now the one I will come back too for the over-all performance, still keeping the Siepi/Tebaldi/di Stefano/Serafin highlights close to my heart, definately so for the devil.

Last, for those who pays interest in useless detail - the Decca people, has choosen to give this release of the recording a catalogue number that ends with 666! --- Mr JB (Karlskrona Sweden)

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