

Giacomo Meyerbeer - Le Prophète (1976)

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CD 1: 1. *Le Prophète / Act I - Prélude - La brise est muette* 2. *Le Prophète / Act I - Mon coeur s'élançait et palpait* 3. *Le Prophète / Act I - Fidès, ma bonne mère* 4. *Le Prophète / Act I - Ad nos, ad salutarem undam* 5. *Le Prophète / Act I - Ainsi ces beaux châteaux?* 6. *Le Prophète / Act I - Ô roi des cieux* 7. *Le Prophète / Act I - Le Comte d'Oberthal, le seigneur Châtelain!* 8. *Le Prophète / Act I - Un jour, dans les flots de la Meuse* 9. *Le Prophète / Act I - Eh quoi! tant de candeur* 10. *Le Prophète / Act II - Valsons toujours* 11. *Le Prophète / Act II - Ami, quel nuage obscurcit ta pensée?* 12. *Le Prophète / Act II - Pour Berthe moi je soupire* 13. *Le Prophète / Act II - Ils partent, grâce au ciel!* 14. *Le Prophète / Act II - Ah! mon fils, sois béni!* 15. *Le Prophète / Act II - O fureur! le ciel ne tonne pas sur ces têtes impies!* 16. *Le Prophète / Act II - Gémissant sous le joug et sous la tyrannie* 17. *Le Prophète / Act II - Ne sais-tu pas qu'en France* 18. *Le Prophète / Act II - Et la couronne* CD 2: 1. *Le Prophète / Act III - Du sang! du sang! du sang!* 2. *Le Prophète / Act III - Aussi nombreux que les étoiles* 3. *Le Prophète / Act III - Voici la fin du jour* 4. *Le Prophète / Act III - Voici les fermières* 5. *Le Prophète / Act III - Valse* 6. *Le Prophète / Act III - Pas de Redowa* 7. *Le Prophète / Act III - Quadrille* 8. *Le Prophète / Act III - Galop* 9. *Le Prophète / Act III - Livrez-vous au repos, frères* 10. *Le Prophète / Act III - Sous votre bannière* 11. *Le Prophète / Act III - Pour prendre Munster* 12. *Le Prophète / Act III - Mais pourquoi dans l'ombre demeurer ainsi?* 13. *Le Prophète / Act III - Qu'on le mène au supplice!* 14. *Le Prophète / Act III - Par toi Munster nous fut promis* 15. *Le Prophète / Act III - Qui vous a sans mon ordre entraînés aux combats?* 16. *Le Prophète / Act III - Éternel, Dieu sauveur* 17. *Le Prophète / Act III - Grand prophète* 18. *Le Prophète / Act III - Roi du ciel et des anges* 19. *Le Prophète / Act IV - Courbons notre tête* 20. *Le Prophète / Act IV - Donnez, donnez pour une pauvre âme* 21. *Le Prophète / Act IV - C'est l'heure!* 22. *Le Prophète / Act IV - Un pauvre pèlerin!* 23. *Le Prophète / Act IV - Dernier espoir, lueur dernière* CD 3:

1. *Le Prophète / Act IV - Un matin je trouvai dans mon humble logis* 2. *Le Prophète / Act IV - La Marche du couronnement* 3. *Le Prophète / Act IV - Domine, salvum fac regem nostrum* 4. *Le Prophète / Act IV - Le voilà, le Roi Prophète* 5. *Le Prophète / Act IV - Qui je suis?* 6. *Le Prophète / Act IV - Arrêtez!* 7. *Le Prophète / Act IV - Tu chérissais ce fils dont j'offre les traits?* 8. *Le Prophète / Act V - Ainsi vous l'attestez?* 9. *Le Prophète / Act V - O prêtres de Baal* 10. *Le Prophète / Act V - O toi qui m'abandonnes* 11. *Le Prophète / Act V - Comme un éclair précipité* 12. *Le Prophète / Act V - Ma mère! ma mère! ma mère!* 13. *Le Prophète / Act V - Eh bien! si le remords s'éveille dans ton âme* 14. *Le Prophète / Act V - Voici le souterrain* 15. *Le Prophète / Act V - Loin de la ville* 16. *Le Prophète / Act V - Ô spectre, ô spectre épouvantable!* 17. *Le Prophète / Act V - Hourra! hourra! gloire! gloire!* 18. *Le Prophète / Act V - Versez! que tout*

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respire l'ivresse et le délire

Fidès – Marilyn Horne Jean de Leyden – James McCracken Berthe – Renata Scotto Le Comte d'Oberthal – Jules Bastin Zacharie – Jerome Hines Jonas – Jean Dupouy Mathisen – Christian du Plessis 1er Paysan – Oliver Broome 2e Paysan – John Noble 1ère Paysanne – Patricia Clark 2e Paysanne – Shirley Minty 1er Bourgeois & 1er Anabaptiste – Vernon Midgley Officier & 2e Anabaptiste – Leslie Fyson 2e Bourgeois – Neilson Taylor 3e Bourgeois – Bruce Ogston Un soldat – John Treleaven 1er Enfant – Nicholas Webb 2e Enfant – Mark Richardson Ambrosian Opera Chorus; Boys Choir, Haberdashers' Aske's School, Elstree Royal Philharmonic Orchestra Conductor – Henry Lewis Rec.: Henry Wood Hall, Trinity Church Square, London; 30.VI, 1, 2, 6, 9, 10-14.VII.1976.

This recording of what was once among the most popular operas of all was made in 1976. It has been reissued several times since then, in increasingly less sumptuous packaging (the 2016 version includes a cast list, a plot summary keyed to the track division, and little else). Casual observers may wonder what the big deal is. It's true; there are some big names involved. Marilyn Horne as Fidès, the mother of the tenor lead Jean de Leyden, was in fine form. The other top soprano, Renata Scotto, was a trifle less so, but there are some magnificent duets that, for lovers of the 1970s scene, may well be worth the price of admission (sample CD 1, track 8, "Un jour dans les flots de la Meuse"). But James McCracken as Jean is not in the same league, and the 1970s studio sound has a hollow quality that may make you think you're hearing theater sound. Really, the reason this recording has lasted so long is that nothing has come along to supplant it, and the opera is underrated. Its theme of elites living in fear of religious mobs has acquired new relevance, and its libretto by Eugène Scribe balances action, history, and romance as few other operatic stories have. The best reason to buy this album is that the time has come to appreciate why our great-grandparents knew *Le Prophète* so much better than we do. ---James Manheim, AllMusic Review

"People of my father's generation," said Reynaldo Hahn, "would rather have doubted the solar system than the supremacy of *Le Prophète* over all other operas". Meyerbeer once again returned to the theme of religion and politics; if *Huguenots* is about religious bigotry, *Le Prophète* is about religion hijacked by unscrupulous men for political gain, and the dangers of utopianism. The Prophet is the Anabaptist leader John of Leyden, who captured Münster and ruled there tyrannically until he was overthrown and executed. Meyerbeer's Jean is an impressive psychological portrait: a dreamy idealist and mother's boy, a puppet of the murderously hypocritical Anabaptists, and a ruthless soldier. The work, set in the Netherlands and Germany in the early sixteenth century at the time of the Peasants' War, was rewritten after

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the revolutions of 1848 and 1849. Meyerbeer is sympathetic to the grievances of the oppressed peasantry but does not suggest revolution as the answer.

The work is sombre in tone. Highlights of the score include the famous Cathedral Scene, which greatly impressed Verdi, and which opens with the Coronation March (possibly Meyerbeer's best-known piece today); the divertissement of the skating ballet; and the arioso "Ah! mon fils, sois béni" and cavatine "Ô prêtres de Baal" sung by Jean's mother, Fidès.

It was because of the role of Jean's mother Fidès that the work was long delayed. Meyerbeer completed the first draft of *Le prophète* in 1841, but lodged the score with his Paris lawyer and refused to stage it because the Opéra director, Leon Pillet, wanted his mistress Rosine Stoltz to sing the role of Fidès, mother of the prophet, while Meyerbeer wanted Pauline Viardot. In 1849, Pillet was sacked, and Duponchel became director—and on 16 April 1849, nearly a decade after it was composed, the opera was at long last performed.

The opera was staged in London in the same year, and in Germany, Vienna, Lisbon, Antwerp, New Orleans, Budapest, Brussels, Prague and Basel the next. Of the various recordings, the best is undoubtedly the Henry Lewis recording with Nicolai Gedda as Jean and Marilyn Horne as Fidès (Opera Magic – OM24186). Warning: another recording (Opera d'Oro - B00004SU9S) exists with these singers; it is roughly recorded, and the listener can hear the conductor restart numbers and musicians turning pages. A new recording needs to be made, using the critical edition of the score published in 2010, which incorporates the manuscript full score found in the Bibliothèque National de Paris and several sections of the opera cut during rehearsals, the original parts of which were found in the Paris Opéra archives in the 1990s. ---Nick Fuller, musicweb-international.com

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