

Puccini - Madama Butterfly (Barbirolli) [1966]

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 06 May 2010 12:49 - Last Updated Tuesday, 25 March 2014 22:38

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Disc 1 1 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 1. E soffitto, e pareti 2 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 1. Questa e la cameriera 3 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 1. Dovunque al mondo 4 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 1. Quale smania vi prende! 5 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 1. Quanto cielo!... Ancora un passo or via 6 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 1. Gran ventura 7 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 1. L'Imperial Commissario 8 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 1. Vieni, amor mio! 9 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 1. Ieri son salita tutta sola 10 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 1. Ed eccoci in famiglia 11 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 1. Viene la sera 12 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 1. Bimba dagli occhi pieni di malia 13 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 1. Vogliatemi bene, un bene piccolino 14 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. E Izaghi ed Izanami 15 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Un bel di vedremo 16 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. C'e. Entrate 17 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Non lo sapete insomma

Disc 2 1 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. A voi pero giurerei fede costante 2 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Ora a noi 3 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. E questo? e questo? 4 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Che tua madre dovra 5 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Io scendo al piano 6 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Vespa! Rospo maledetto! 7 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Una nave da guerra 8 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Scuoti quella fronda di ciliegio 9 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Or vienmi ad adornar 10 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Humming Chorus 11 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Oh eh! Oh eh! Oh eh! 12 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Povera Butterfly 13 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Io so che alle sue pene 14 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Addio, fiorito asil 15 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Glielo dirai? 16 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Che vuol da me? 17 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Come una mosca prigioniera 18 Madama Butterfly (Madame Butterfly), opera: Act 2. Con onor muore

Renata Scotto (Soprano - Madama Butterfly) Carlo Bergonzi (Tenor - Lieutenant Pinkerton) Anna di Stasio (Mezzo Soprano - Suzuki) Rolando Panerai (Baritone - Sharpless) Piero de Palma (Tenor - Goro) Giuseppe Morresi (Bass Baritone - Principe Yamadori) Paolo Montarsolo (Bass - Bonze) Silvana Padoan (Mezzo Soprano - Kate Pinkerton) Mario Rinaudo

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(Bass - Imperial Commissioner) Rome Opera House Chorus and Orchestra John Barbirolli - conductor, 1966

After his long association with the Hallé and New York Orchestras, it was a shock to some when the then 67 year-old maestro Barbirolli, JB as he was known, was chosen for this major recording. Those who knew of his distinguished work at Covent Garden and other opera houses in the pre-war years would have been less so. There was perhaps another agenda. The Rome orchestra was getting sloppy and stropy. I well remember JB returning from the sessions describing how on the first morning he had brought them to heel with a mixture of 'colloquial' Italian combined with a glare that could set fire to a score at twenty paces! There was more to it than that of course. Barbirolli knew and loved this music and the orchestra soon realised this. They came to know and love this small man and gave him one of their best performances in years. The whole glows with joint commitment.

Right from the start the performance exudes quality singing from its all-Italian cast. Track 1 introduces the elegant phrasing and golden tones of Carlo Bergonzi as the caddish Pinkerton and the unwavering steady voice of Piero de Paima as Goro the marriage broker; the ultimate comprimario, in a part so often given to a reedy unsteady voice. Track 2 brings the creamy tones of Anna di Stasio's Suzuki, and tr 5 the nut brown perfectly centred voice of Panerai as the luckless Sharpless who, ultimately, has to pick up the pieces. Track 6 heralds the arrival of Butterfly. Scotto's full tone and voice at this point poses the question, 'will she sound too old for a supposed 15 year old', as Tebaldi does (on Double Decca), also with, Bergonzi and tastefully conducted by Serafin. In the succeeding exchanges with Pinkerton, she adopts a lighter more girlish tone as she introduces her possessions and the 'marriage' ceremony is concluded.

The arrival of the Bonze of Paolo Montarsolo continues the quality idiomatic voices (tr 12), and further highlights what has been evident from the opening chords, JB's grasp of the nuances of the score. His pacing is in no way rushed nor is it as laggardly, or over indulgent, as Karajan (Decca, 3 discs at full price). His use of rubato, combined with the shaping of the phrases and shading of the dynamics, results in an all encompassing emotional effect. The orchestra, as indicated, play superbly for their new maestro, whilst the Italian choir bring their particular 'squilla' to the singing of their own language.

The recording wears its age well. Whilst it lacks a little of the natural warmth and presence of the best modern recordings it is lucid and well balanced and set in a clear acoustic. Given the excellent diction of the singers it is a pleasure to follow the libretto, which is provided with

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English, French and German translations. There is also a useful track related synopsis and photographs from the sessions.

Given the foregoing one has to wonder why this performance has had such a varied career on CD, before being given the accolade, justifiable in my view, of inclusion in this 'Series'. The answer lies, I think, in the response to the singing of Scotto who sometimes over-characterises the girlishness of Butterfly and has the odd raw note at the top of her voice when under pressure. The upside of her interpretation however, is, that she lives and breathes all of Butterfly's many emotions leaving the involved listener 'gutted' at her final tragedy. Whereas Bergonzi and Panerai can stand comparison with any other on disc, Freni, for Karajan, is the perfect Butterfly, balancing legato and subtle characterisation with a wide palate of tonal colour. However, as a total 'package' this Butterfly takes a lot of beating and is justifiably a 'GROC'.
---Robert J Farr, musicweb-international.com

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