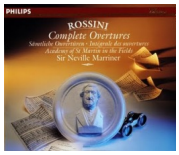
Rossini - Complete Overtures (1980)



CD1
Overture to Guillaume Tell (William Tell)
Overture to Le siège de Corinthe
Overture to La cenerentola (Cinderella)
Overture to La gazza ladra (The Thieving Magpie)
Overture to La cambiale di matrimonio
Overture to La scala di seta (The Silken Ladder)
Overture to Tancredi
Overture to Il signor Bruschino
Overture to Il turco in Italia (The Turk in Italy)
Overture to L'inganno felice

CD2
Maometto II, opera: Overture
Overture to Ricciardo e Zoraide
Overture al conventello, for orchestra in D major
Sinfonia (Overture) in D major (di Bologna), QR vii/1
Overture to Semiramide
Overture to Il viaggio a Reims (spurious)
Overture to Il barbiere di Siviglia (The Barber of Seville)
Overture to L'italiana in Algeri (The Italian Girl in Algiers)

CD3
Bianca e Falliero, opera: Overture
Otello, opera: Overture
Demetrio e Polibio, opera: Overture
Edoardo e Cristina, opera: Overture
Armida, opera: Overture
Edipio a Colono, incidental music for bass, chorus & orchestra: Overture
Ermione, opera: Overture
Torvaldo e Dorliska, opera: Overture

Academy of St. Martin in the Fields
Sir Neville Marriner – conductor

One French wit in the early part of the nineteenth century observed that he had more fun at a Rossini opera than in the bedroom, and Rossini's irresistable melodies, infectious gaiety, and wild zany sense of humor, all coupled with the dizzy acceleration of the famous Rossini crescendo makes this music as captivating and exciting today as it was two centuries ago when ladies intoxicated by the emotional power of the music fainted in the aisles. Rossini also wrote more serious music, his Otello was a great favorite of a man who knew his operas, Verdi, and the set also includes examples of this less known side of the composer of the Barber of Seville.

Neville Marriner recorded a great number of Rossini overtures back in the second half of the seventies, between 1974 and 1980, and this 3 CD set rounds up the lot and presents them in one box set. No attempt has been made to issue them in the order of composition - indeed the first CD begins with the last - the famous William Tell Overture. The rarer and earlier works, generally of far less interest, are closeted away on the third CD, while the first CD garners many of the best, and the second CD at least has several genuine masterpieces among the lesser pieces.

Rossini was a master of the orchestra, and certainly there is far more than enough to justify two CDs, if not three. However, Philips is not charging an arm and a leg for the box set, so perhaps it's best to view the lesser ones as an addendum.

The performances are brisk, with excellent rythmic impetus, and played with the pure clean tones favored by the Academy. Marriner doesn't surpass the greatest versions in the major works, such as the legendary Toscanini, or in stereo, Szell, but Marriner and his orchestra are alert and highly finished. Overall these grade out at between A to B+ performances; surely a box set anyone could enjoy over time. The set might also make a nice addition to a single CD set of the Rossini overtures. Again you have a chance with this set to hear a truly great master working up a form to ever more and more astonishing displays of pure pandemonium.

The sound has been improved from the LPs, which, while pretty enough, lacked a little oomph. These improvements make for a greater swagger and power, not always quite reached on the LPs. The sound stage and sonic effects fall a little short of the best recent recordings - the snare drum in La gazza ladra simply doesn't richocet off the walls as it can in live performances or

contemporary SACD CDs. However, the musicianship remains very high, and if you originally owned and liked the first LP issues, these on CD will not be a disappointment.

A nine page essay in English by Philip Gosset discusses the overtures in fair historical detail - also in French and German translation.

A very good set, then, with the understanding that most people might be happy with a single CD of Rossini's overtures, such as Rossini: Overtures or in an expensive but stunning SACD reissue of the Cleveland Orchestra under Szell Rossini, Auber, Berlioz: Overtures [SACD]. For the adventuresome, this set should provide a wealth of interest and much pleasure.

Playing one of the CDs again I am even more impressed by the level of achievement. This is a terrific CD set! ---Doug - Haydn Fan, amazon.com

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