

Antonio Vivaldi - La Verità In Cimento (2002)

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Disc 1 1. *Allegro* 2. *Andante* 3. *Allegro* 4. *Recitativo* 5. *Aria Mi Fe Reo L'Amor D'un Figlio* 6. *Recitativo* 7. *Aria Vorrei Veder Anch' lo* 8. *Recitativo* 9. *Aria Solo Quella Guancia Bella* 10. *Recitativo* 11. *Aria Ne Vostri Dolci Sguardi* 12. *Recitativo* 13. *Aria Tu M'Offendi* 14. *Recitativo* 15. *Aria La Del Nilo Sull'Arene* 16. *Recitativo* 17. *Recitativo* 18. *Aria Se L'acquisto Di Quel Soglio* 19. *Recitativo* 20. *Aria Fragil Fior, Ch'appena Nasce* 21. *Trio Aure Placide, E Serene* 22. *Recitativo* 23. *Aria No, Non Ti Credo* 24. *Recitativo* 25. *Aria Mi Vuoi Tradir, Lo So* Disc 2 1. *Recitativo* 2. *Aria Amato Ben Tu Sei La Mia Speranza* 3. *Recitativo* 4. *Aria Vinta A Pie D'un Dolce Affetto* 5. *Recitativo* 6. *Aria Addio Caro, Tu Ben Sai* 7. *Recitativo* 8. *Recitativo* 9. *Aria Un Tenore Affetto* 10. *Recitativo* 11. *Aria Quel Bel Ciglio, Quel Bel Volto* 12. *Recitativo* 13. *Aria Occhio Non Gira* 14. *Recitativo* 15. *Recitativo* 16. *Aria Tu Sei Sol Dell' Alma Mia* 17. *Recitativo* 18. *Quintetto Anima Mia, Mio Ben*
Disc 3
1. *Recitativo* 2. *Aria Lo Splendor* 3. *Recitativo* 4. *Aria Crudele, Tu Brami* 5. *Recitativo* 6. *Aria Quando Serve Alla Ragione* 7. *Recitativo* 8. *Aria Lagrimette Alle Pupille* 9. *Recitativo* 10. *Aria Cara Sorte Di Chi Nata* 11. *Recitativo* 12. *Recitativo* 13. *Aria Con Cento, E Cento Baci* 14. *Recitativo* 15. *Aria Sia Conforto Alle Tue Piaghe* 16. *Recitativo* 17. *Recitativo* 18. *Coro Dopo I Nembi, E Le Procelle*
Rosane - Gemma Bertagnolli Rustena - Guillemette Laurens Melindo - Sara Mingardo
Damira - Nathalie Stutzmann Zelim - Philippe Jaroussky Mamud - Anthony Rolfe-Johnson
Ensemble Matheus Jean-Christophe Spinosi

Opus 111's Vivaldi: *La verità in cimento* (Truth Put to the Test) is the first complete recording of Antonio Vivaldi's 1720 opera, made in conjunction with a revival of this work at the Bologna Festival, albeit with a different group of singers. This recording has an excellent frontline cast, including veteran singers such as Anthony Rolfe Johnson, Gemma Bertagnolli, Guillemette Laurens, Nathalie Stutzmann, and Sara Mingardo and newcomer Philippe Jaroussky, who is the only vocalist here to have survived from the original Bologna Festival production. The band is Ensemble Matheus under the direction of Jean-Christophe Spinosi, and the instrumental complement is especially aggressive in executing extreme dynamics in Vivaldi. Some may find

it a bit much; Spinosi's group almost makes Fabio Biondi sound romantic in approach, though conversely in Europe its work has been very well received overall. This is an extraordinary opera by anyone's standards, an outstanding selection being the ethereal trio, "Aure placide, e serene," featuring the combined talents of Bertagnolli, Mingardo and Jaroussky. Those looking for the aria "La pena amara" -- stated in a popular published edition of Vivaldi's arias as belonging to "La verità in cimento," but perhaps not so -- will be disappointed. However, another aria from this work, "Amato ben tu sei la mia speranza," has developed a life of its own and is performed splendidly well here by Gemma Bertagnolli. Vivaldi's story is a comedy of errors set in the court of a Turkish sultan and is rife with numerous deceptions, foils, and intrigues and, in the Bologna Festival production, was given in modern dress; thankfully a complete libretto is included so that the listener can keep track of every twist and turn of the convoluted plot. ---
Uncle Dave Lewis , Rovi

La verità in cimento ("Truth put to the test"), dating from 1720, is a superb, stageworthy work about a Sultan (Mamud), his wife (Rustena), his mistress (Damira), and the sons each of them bore on the same day many years before (Zelim and Melindo, respectively). The bastard has been raised as the true heir (for reasons too complicated to go into here), but now, late in his life, Mamud wants to make certain that the true heir is not robbed of his inheritance. (As the opera opens, he has just informed Damira of this fact, and she is hardly pleased.) Meanwhile, a foreign Princess, Rosane, is loved by Zelim but she is slated to marry Melindo (for political reasons)--though frankly, she seems willing to go where the power and money are. All of this makes Damira turn manipulative and upsets the whole court. It is happily resolved, behind the Sultan's back, by wife and mistress. The opera cannot be called comic, but there are wonderfully funny moments of overwrought behavior. The feelings expressed in the arias (24 of them, all da capo, all relatively brief)--jealousy, rage, sarcasm, love, disappointment--are vivid, bordering on ferocious, and they make the characters' strong personalities very clear.

Between January and April, 2002, conductor Jean-Christophe Spinosi and his Ensemble Matheus toured all over France with the work; it then returned to Italy (Bologna) after 282 years and was recorded soon after. Spinosi has his strings attack with vigor and veritable thrashing when the situation calls for it and he relies heavily on the most forceful beat in any given aria so that the entire show practically dances. Most of the scoring is for strings and continuo (including harpsichord, Baroque guitar, theorbo) in different combinations, but the addition of other instruments is magnificently thought out: sweet, pastoral flutes when Rustena is reflecting on her own innocence and prior happiness, trumpets accompanying Melindo when he declares his intention to disobey the cruel Mamud, and so forth. Between Spinosi's vast variances in tempos and dynamics, this is an opera in constant emotional motion and we can hear it even if we can't see it. The arias, alternating between sparkling, introspective, and ironic, are all suitably

embellished by singers and players.

Gemma Bertagnolli sings the flighty Rosane's music vividly; her feats of high coloratura belie her sincerity but leave us liking her anyway. The outrageously low tessitura for Damira is superbly handled by Nathalie Stutzmann. Her dissembling reaches its peak in a third-act aria in which she advises the disconsolate Rustena to "add artifice to your truth...use tears as weapons," and the vocal line, to which she adds almost exaggerated portamento, has her slithering up and down the scale with what might be called an "audible sneer". The always wonderful Sara Mingardo (where would Baroque opera be without her?) is fierce as Melindo, certain in his refusal to be deprived of his throne and tossing off the roulades to prove it, and Guillemette Laurens, as Rustena, sings so beautifully that we are never bothered by the character's self-righteousness. Rounding out the cast is countertenor Phillippe Jaroussky--a great discovery--as Zelim, and Anthony Rolfe Johnson as Mamud, with somewhat weary tone but, as always, true authority and musical intelligence.

A trio, "Aure placide e serene", in which the rival half brothers and Rosane, the woman they both love, express their mixed feelings in a garden of citrus trees amid metaphors of breezes, babbling brooks and "lovely, innocent boughs", is as beautiful as *Così fan tutte*'s famous "Soave sia il vento", and I suspect we'll never hear it more ravishingly performed. Sonics are just about perfect--clean, clear, and crisp. This opera and recording offer spectacular surprises.--Robert Levine, ClassicsToday.com

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