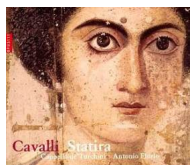


Cavalli – Statira, Principessa di Persia (2004)



Disc: 1 1. Sinfonia 2. Prologo. Recitativo 3. Act 1. Scene 1. Aria. Notte ascondi i tesari, Statira 4. Act 1. Scene 1. Recitativo 5. Act 1. Scene 1. Duetto. Tenebre tentatrici 6. Act 1. Scene 2. Aria. Amor che mascherasti 7. Act 1. Scene 3. Recitativo 8. Act 1. Scene 4. Recitativo 9. Act 1. Scene 5. Recitativo 10. Act 1. Scene 6. Recitativo 11. Act 1. Scene 7. Recitativo 12. Act 1. Scene 8. Recitativo 13. Act 1. Scene 9. Recitativo 14. Act 1. Scene 10. Recitativo 15. Act 1. Scene 10. Aria. All'idol del mio core, Nicarco 16. Act 1. Scene 11. Recitativo 17. Act 1. Scene 12. Aria. Gioventù, non è più 18. Act 1. Scene 13. Aria. Son vil serva, et amo un Re: Deità che movete 19. Act 1. Scene 14. Recitativo 20. Act 1. Scene 15. Duetto. Amiamci, e non divida, Statira, Cloridaspe 21. Act 1. Scene 16. Recitativo 22. Act 2. Scene 1. Recitativo 23. Act 2. Scene 2. Recitativo 24. Act 2. Scene 3. Aria. Fra l'armi, mio core 25. Act 2. Scene 4. Recitativo 26. Act 2. Scene 5. Recitativo 27. Act 2. Scene 5. Recitativo 28. Act 2. Scene 6. Aria. Non parto io no Disc: 2 1. Act 2. Scene 7. Recitativo 2. Act 2. Scene 8. Recitativo 3. Act 2. Scene 9. Aria. La tromba orgogliosa 4. Act 2. Scene 10. Aria. All'armi mio core 5. Act 2. Scene 11. Recitativo 6. Act 2. Scene 12. Recitativo 7. Act 2. Scene 12. Aria. Merfi, mia Patria, Regno 8. Act 2. Scene 13. Recitativo. Aria. Amanti semplicetti, Vaffrino 9. Act 2. Scene 14. Aria. Io per me ragione havrei, Elisenna 10. Act 3. Scene 1. Recitativo 11. Act 3. Scene 3. Aria. Era pur la bella cosa 12. Act 3. Scene 4. Recitativo 13. Act 3. Scene 5. Aria. Lassa che fo, che veggio 14. Act 3. Scene 6. Recitativo 15. Act 3. Scene 7. Recitativo 16. Act 3. Scene 8. Recitativo 17. Act 3. Scene 9. Recitativo 18. Act 3. Scene 10. Aria. Lontananza, Statira 19. Act 3. Scene 10. Aria. Quante son le donzelle 20. Act 3. Scene 11. Aria. Su dunque, a che tardate 21. Act 3. Scene 12. Recitativo 22. Act 3. Scene 13. Recitativo 23. Act 3. Scene 14. Recitativo 24. Act 3. Scenes 15 & 16. Recitativo 25. Act 3. Scene 17. Recitativo 26. Act 3. Scene ultima. Tutti. Mio bene, idolo mio; Alle nozze, alle nozze

Plutone – Giuseppe Naviglio (bass) Maga – Roberta Andalo (soprano) Mercurio – Stefano di Fraia (tenor) Statira – Roberta Invernizzi (soprano) Cloridaspe – Dionisia di Vico (mezzo-soprano) Ermosilla/Usimano – Maria Ercolano (soprano) Elisenna – Giuseppe de Vittorio (tenor) Nicarco – Giuseppe Naviglio (bass) Dario – Giuseppe Naviglio (bass) Floralba – Maria Grazia Schiavo (soprano) Brimonte – Daniela del Monaco (contralto) Vaffrino – Rosario Totaro (tenor) Eurillo – Roberta Andalo (soprano) Brisante – Stefano di Fraia (tenor) Messo – Valentina Varriale (soprano) Cappella de' turchini
Antonio Florio - conductor

Cavalli's 'Statira, Principessa di Persia' was first performed in Venice in 1656 to a libretto by Busanello, who had provided the libretti for Cavalli's 'Gli Amori di Apollo e di Dafne' and 'Didone'. Quite a number of Cavalli's operas received performances in Naples soon after their premieres in Venice. This was probably planned for 'Statira' but plague in Naples put paid to this plan. The opera was in fact revived in Naples in 1666 as part of the celebrations for the coronation of Philip 4th of Spain, its last performances until modern times.

The surviving manuscripts of the opera shed some interesting light on the operatic practices of the period. A manuscript, connected with the 1666 Naples performances gives us a pretty complete musical picture of the work as performed there. Also surviving is an incomplete manuscript relating to the Venice performances which has no mythological prologue or finale but what makes it fascinating is that it is substantially in Cavalli's own hand. In his notes Dinko Fabris argues that this score was a notebook, containing material from various versions and corresponding to no particular performance.

For this disc, Antonio Florio and his Cappella di Turchini give us a complete performance of the Naples version, complete with comic scenes and other items which may have been added specially for Naples by hands other than Cavalli's.

The story turns on the amatory adventures of Statira, princess of Persia (in real life a daughter of Darius, she became Alexander the Great's second wife). Having nursed Cloridaspe, King of Arabia, after he was wounded in battle, the two have fallen in love. This love is hindered by Statira's two hand-maidens. One, Floralba, is in love with Cloridaspe herself. The other, Ermosilla, is actually a man (Usimano) who is masquerading as Statira's serving woman as he is in love with Statira. To complicate matters Nicarco has fallen in love with Ermosilla. The plot gradually works itself out, with many complications along the way. There are further battles, Cloridaspe is captured and rescued by Ermosilla/Usimano (initially pretending to be a woman dressed as a man). Ermosilla/Usimano kills Nicarco because he refuses to kill Cloridaspe. The action is aided (or hindered) by a group of servants. Vaffrino, Nicarco's black servant; Elissena, Statira's old nurse and played by a man; Eurillo, Statira's page. The principal comic element in the opera comes from the play that is made on the fact that Elissena is sung by a man; this especially when Eurillo pretends to woo her. Of course, all ends happily with Statira married to Cloridaspe, Floralba (revealed to be Cloridaspe's sister) married to Usimano.

There is a great deal of recitative, interspersed with some lovely arias in Cavalli's typical style with charming melodies over dance rhythms. But if you do not speak Italian, you do have to

spend a lot of time following the opera with the libretto to come to understand the opera. But for those that do understand Italian, and for those who simply love the language, this set is a dream as it is performed by an all Italian speaking cast who bring the work's language to the fore, making really dramatic play with the text.

Antonio Flori's Capella de Turchini are a small group who give a crisp flexible performance of the work. Cavalli does not give them many moments to really shine, but they provide just the capable and discreet accompaniment needed in opera of this period and type.

Regarding the singers, things are rather more mixed when it comes to their voices. In the title role, soprano Roberta Invernizzi is simply lovely. She sings with a rich voice, providing good, flexible ornaments. In her aria in Scene 9 of Act 2, she shows herself perfectly capable of delivering a brilliant vocal part when needed.

Mezzo-soprano Dionisia di Vico, sings Cloridaspe with lovely firm tones, though the part sounds a little too low for her and I did wonder what sort of voice it was originally written for. Still, she sings Cavalli's music with a fine sense of shape and style and her duets with Statira are quite lovely.

As Ermosilla/Usimano, soprano Maria Ercolano has some of the most dramatic action. The scene where she/he kills Nicarco is brilliantly dramatic, but Ercolano also hauntingly sings Usimano's lament for his native land.

Tenor Giuseppe de Vittorio is the travesty Elissena, making much play with her comic by play. His is not the most subtle of performances, but in this sort of part who can really complain.

As Floralba, soprano Maria Grazia Schiavo displays some lovely bright tones. Her aria in Scene XIII of Act 1 is a charming, dance-like number, but here and in other places her performance is marred by a tendency to lose focus in the upper register.

Bass Giuseppe Naviglio plays three roles; Pluto in the prologue and then the small role of Darius and Nicarco. As Darius he displays a pleasant, firm baritone register, but in the longer

role of Nicarco he is apt to bluster and his ornamentation can be a little sketchy.

As the councillor, Brimonte, contralto Daniela del Monaco displays rather counter-tenor-like tones which unfortunately sometimes lack focus. The part sometimes sounded a little low for her and this rather marred her delivery of ornamentation in her aria.

As the black servant, Vaffrino, tenor Rosario Totaro provides a voice which is rich in character, but rather over-heavy on vibrato. His performance is vivid, but not always easy on the ear.

Roberta Andalo sings the small role of Eurillo, but has the advantage of having the funniest part in the opera when Eurillo 'woos' Elisenna in an amusing scene full of lovely verbal conceits.

Despite their occasional vocal uncertainties, the cast have a pretty good grasp of the style and mood of Cavalli's piece and combined with their wonderful projection of the text, makes for an enthralling listen. A more international cast might give us a more musically perfect performance, but they are unlikely to give us such a vivid one. ---Robert Hugill,
www.musicweb-international.com

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