Great Voices of the Opera (2011) CD2 - Rosa Ponselle

2-1 –Rosa Ponselle Goodby 4:09 2-2 –Rosa Ponselle Tosca: Vissi D'arte 3:15 2-3 –Rosa Ponselle Madame Butterfly: Un Bel di Vedremo 4:35 2-4 –Rosa Ponselle Aida: O Terra Addio 4:16 2-5 –Rosa Ponselle La Forza Del Destino: Pace, Pace Mio Dio 4:26 2-6 –Rosa Ponselle Ladko: Song Of India 4:09 2-7 –Rosa Ponselle Elégie 3:55 2-8 –Rosa Ponselle Ave Maria 4:46 2-9 –Rosa Ponselle Norma: Sediziose Voci ... Casta Diva 8:06 2-10 –Rosa Ponselle La Vestale: O Nume Tutelar 3:35 2-11 –Rosa Ponselle Otello: Ave Maria 4:27 2-12 –Rosa Ponselle The Nightingale And The Rose 3:49

The mother of American soprano Rosa Ponselle (born Ponzillo) was her first voice teacher; later she studied with Anna Ryan. As a teenager, she teamed with her sister Carmela to form a vaudeville act which included classical as well as popular songs. In 1918, she came to the attention of Giulio Gatti-Casazzi, the manager of the Metropolitan Opera Company and the great tenor Enrico Caruso. Together, they orchestrated her debut at the Metropolitan Opera on November 15, 1918, as Leonore in Verdi's La forza del destino. Her success that evening -- having never been on an opera stage before -- made her an instant star, and careful management of her career kept her continually active until her abrupt retirement in 1937 at the age of 40.

During her tenure at the Metropolitan Opera, she excelled in the heavier bel canto and Verdi roles. Only the second soprano to sing the role of Norma there, she also sang Giulia in La vestale, Rachel in La Juive, Aida, Elisabetta in Don Carlo, Gioconda and Selika in L'africaine. Late in her career, she added Violetta in La Traviata and Carmen to her repertoire. These two roles caused much controversy. Violetta is usually associated with much lighter voices, and her performance of "Sempre libera" was certainly not as clean as those of many of her rivals. Her interpretation of Carmen was criticized for being too vulgar by critics who said that she looked more like a vamp than a gypsy.

These criticisms are often held as the reason for her early retirement; however, an additional factor may have been her fear of the soprano high C. An audible vocal crack during a performance of Aida in the mid-1920s contributed to a lack of confidence in singing that note. She never sang Aida again in New York although she did sing it on tour. She had sections of Norma and La Traviata transposed down in order to avoid the high C.

She made only two trips to Europe to sing in opera. Though both trips were a great success, she preferred to stay in the comfort and congeniality of the Metropolitan Opera. Annually, she toured the United States and Canada in concert and recital programs.

After her retirement, she married and moved to Baltimore where she was a driving force with the Baltimore Opera. She rarely left her home, the Villa Pace, after 1950. However, at her home, she was a coach to many great singers and was a generous hostess to young artists.

Ponselle's voice was a rich dramatic soprano, with great natural beauty. The range and technique were excellent and the tone was even throughout the entire range. Her repertoire ranged from Mozart to Mascagni, but surprisingly she never sang any Puccini or Wagner on stage, although their arias did figure in her concerts and recordings. Ponselle left many fine recordings including a series recorded in her home in 1954. The best are selections from Norma and from La Forza del Destino. Her "Ernani, involami" is justly famous, as are the arias from Spontini's La Vestale. Private recordings of her Violetta and Carmen from Metropolitan Opera broadcasts have been issued and allow for a view of her art in the context of a complete performance.

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