

Mirella Freni - Renata Scotto: In Duet (2005)



1 *Le Due Illustre - Leggio già nel vostro cor* 13:02 2 *Bianca e Fernando - Ove son? Che m'avvenne?...Sorgi, o padre* 10:53 3 *Le nozze di Figaro, K.492 / Act 3 - "Cosa mi narri"..."Sull'aria ... che soave zefiretto"* 4:02 4 *Norma / Act 2 - Dormondo entrambi...Mira, O Norma..Si, fino all'ore* 23:53 Mirella Freni – soprano Renata Scotto – soprano Janice Alford – mezzo-soprano National Philharmonic Orchestra Leone Magiera – conductor (1-3) Lorenzo Anselmi – conductor (4)

Admirers of Scotto will note that this version of the Norma/Adalgisa duet (the whole scene from the prelude on) was recorded a full year before Scotto contributed to the complete set of Norma under James Levine, issued last summer (CBS 79327, 7/80). It is partly a question of recording quality and balance, partly of interpretation with Levine a more thrusting conductor, but also of vocal condition that in almost every way this recital version is a more sympathetic rendering. Where in the CBS performance the unevenness of the voice under pressure in the upper register is often disagreeable, it is only at the end of the long opening solo that it emerges here, and generally with Anselmi an understanding accompanist, it is altogether sweeter, subtler and more delicately pointed. In both the high phrase, "Teneri, teneri figli", is delicately floated, but the full bloom of the voice comes out far more in the Decca recording. The fierceness of the declaration "Di Pollion son figli" may be less abrasive here, but it still has a Callas-like tang.

It is only in the last third of the side that the duet proper "Mira, o Norma" arrives, and there the matching is beautiful. The cabaletta is here even faster than with Levine, but it is more delicately pointed with the subito piano passages more clearly defined and with better control in the top notes at the end. The matching between two celebrated sopranos of like background was obviously the inspiration for this recital disc, but the rare Mercadante duet—climactic confrontation in an opera praised by Liszt at its first production in 1838—at once reveals a problem. For such a number the voices are too alike, and one distinguishes the voices as much by direction—Scotto on the left, Freni on the right—as by vocal timbre. I am glad to note that with the finished record there will be a full text, which I fear I have not seen. The dramatic

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exchanges in the first part of the duet bring from Scotto some of the squalliness that has disfigured too much of her recent singing (including the complete Norma) but the arioso is enchantingly done by both singers, relaxing at the end—whatever Mercadante's radical pretensions—into the traditional chains of thirds, before the formidable cabaletta.

Welcome as that rarity is, the Bellini item from Bianca e Fernando is even more so, for this passage from an early opera originally written in 1828 and revised two years later, immediately establishes a far more individual voice. Here in a dreamy compound-time melody Freni has the dOminant contribution, and no cabaletta follows. As for the Mozart it will win no award from stylists. But here it is apt enough that the Letter Duet should be given in a romantic Bellinian style, slow and rather dreamy too, and of course with not a hint of an appoggiatura. The recording on both sides is warm and atmospheric with the voices well caught, though nowadays Freni like Scotto is no longer perfectly steady under pressure on top. --- Edward Greenfield, Gramophone [1/1981]

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