

The Art of Joan Sutherland • CD6



01. *Pour ce contract fatal...Salut a la France* (Donizetti *La Fille de r giment* (4:54) 02. *Ocean! thou mighty monster!* (Weber *Oberon*) (8:19) 03. *A vos jeux, mes amis, permettez moi...* (Thomas Hamlet) (12:39) 04. *Le Voila! Je crois entendre* (Thomas Hamlet) (4:05) 05. *Il dolce suono mi colpi di sua voce...Ardon gl'incensi* (Donizetti *Lucia di La...* (16:13) 06. *E' strano! Ah fors' e' lui!* (Verdi *Traviata*) (7:02) 07. *Follie! Delirio vano   questo...Sempre libera* (Verdi *Traviata*) (5:02) 08. *Dormono entrambi* (Bellini *Norma*) (5:01) 09. *Mi chiami, o Norma!* (Bellini *Norma*) (2:33) 10. *Deh! Con te, con te li prendi* (Bellini *Norma*) (3:34) 11. *Mira, o Norma* (Bellini *Norma*) (5:12) 12. *Si, fino all' ore estreme* (Bellini *Norma*) (2:13) Joan Sutherland - soprano Royal Opera House Covent Garden Chorus and Orchest London Symphony Orchestra Welsh National Opera Orchestra Richard Bonyng  – conductor Conservatory Society Concert Orchestra Nello Santi – conductor Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Orchestra John Pritchard – conductor

That Decca produced such a loving and thorough anthology as *The Art of Joan Sutherland* in the lean times of 2004 is a testament to Joan Sutherland's artistic stature and commercial success. She is among the elite few opera stars to have enjoyed both in equal measure, and whose discographies have remained available for many years without interruption. Indeed, Sutherland was among the greatest singers of her time. The doleful beauty of her voice could express extremes of both tragedy and sublimity, and her high notes were virtually unmatched for their clarity and brilliance -- qualities that made her an ideal interpreter of bel canto music, the music on which her fame rests.

The Art of Joan Sutherland covers that bel canto territory (Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, etc.) well, but what sets it apart from other Sutherland collections is how thoroughly it covers the other aspects of her recording career: the six volumes include everything from Handelian opera and oratorio, Wagner, Mozart, Grand opera, and French art song, some of it never before released on CD. The upshot is a far more extensive and far-reaching tribute to Sutherland's singing than has yet been offered. For that reason alone, Sutherland devotees will find this a valuable collection, and

an ear-opening experience. Those looking for a greatest-hits collection, however -- something more tightly focused on the music bearing Sutherland's unique stamp of excellence -- might do better with a smaller collection of arias. There is some unevenness to the collection. Some cuts feel perfunctory and unspecial, like her "Liebestod" from Wagner's "Tristan und Isolde," conducted, as are the majority of the tracks, by her husband Richard Bonyngue. It has no oomph, no grandeur, and no sense of pacing or drama. There are also a few, like her "Voi che sapete" and "Deh, vieni non tardar" from Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro," that simply aren't suited to her vocally -- the first is too low for her, and the second calls for a much simpler sound. But the amazing thing about The Art of Joan Sutherland is just how much of it is great.

Her Handel, recorded during the very early years of her career, is fresh and stylistically impressive. The two discs of French arias -- Sutherland's own favorites according to her liner notes -- reveal an interpretive flexibility that few singers could match. The well-seasoned joyfulness of her "Depuis le jour" (Charpentier's "Louise") is a striking comparison with the childlike glee of her Jewel Song ("Faust") and "Ah! Je veux vivre" ("Roméo et Juliette") of Gounod. Throw in some Offenbach bon bons -- all sung with giddy abandon -- and you begin to understand what made Sutherland so special. The packaging is attractive but minimal, including only brief introductory notes and omitting texts and translations completely. But it represents an excellent value in music, and a fitting tribute to one of opera's most beloved stars. --- Allen Schrott, Rovi

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