Georges Bizet - La Jolie Fille de Perth (2001)

CD1 *1. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: Prélude 2. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*1 - Choeur et scène 3. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*1 bis - Récit 4. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*2 - Couplet 5. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*2 bis - Scène et récit 6. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*3 - Air 7. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*3 bis - Récit 8. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*4 - Duo play 9. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*5 - Trio 10. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*6 - Quatuor 11. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*7 - Chanson et scène finale 12. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*8 - Marche et choeur 13. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*9 - Choeur et rècit 14. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*10 - Chanson a boire 15. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*10 bis - Scène 16. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*11 - Danse bohémienne 17. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*11 bis - Scène 18. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*12 - Couplets 19. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*12 bis - Reprise du coeur 20. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*13 – Sérénade* CD2 *1. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*13 bis - Récit 2. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*14 - Air 3. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*14 bis - Scène Finale 4. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*15 - Choeur et scène 5. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*16 - Cavatine*
play
*6. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*16 bis - Scène 7. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*17 - Duo 8. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*18 - Air 9. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*19 - Final 10. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*20 - Duo et choeur 11. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*21 - Duo 12. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*22 - Scène 13. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*23 - Choeur de la saint-valentin 14. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*23 bis - Scène 15. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*24 - Ballade 16. La Jolie Fille de Perth, opera in 4 acts: N*25 - Final*
Henri Smith - Alfredo Kraus Catharine Glover - June Anderson Simon Glover - Gabriel Bacquier Mab - Margarita Zimmermann Ralph - José van Dam Le Duc de Rothsay - Gino Quilico His Major-Domo - Daniel Ottevaere Un ouvrier - Philippe Duminy Un seigneur - Christian Jean Choeur de Radio France Nouvel Orchestre Philharmonique Georges Prêtre - conductor, 1985

Let's begin with saying that this is a very good recording of a rarely performed and/or recorded opera by Bizet, who also wrote the highly dramatic 'Carmen' and the more lyrically inspired 'les pecheurs de perles', of which Carmen naturally is the masterpiece. La jolie fille de Perth is something in between those two. It has the lyric beauty of 'les pecheurs', but also contain some hints of what was to come in Carmen in form of a more personal style, orchestration and dramatic intensity. In style, though, it is still very much Grand Opera with lots of chorus, some instrumental parts, and a rather poor story that's mostly there to produce as many solonumbers as possible.

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Georges Prêtre here makes a rather fine reading of this lyrical opera, not as histrionic or violent as some other of his performances on disc, although he still at a few times is rather unsensitive - this is though, for example, far better than his almost hysteric account of 'les pecheurs de perles' recorded 8 years before this set. He has also learnt the lesson of letting his singers step forward and work with them, not above them.

The soloists the? Well, we have a great cast here that contributes far more to the four-star rating I've made than Prêtre: A wonderful coloratura soprano from June Andersson, her singing in the finale of act 4 is magnificent; an ever-stylish lyrical tenor from Alfredo Kraus - his ardent voice suits this kind of opera perfectly, the most famous part, the 'serenade' is very beautiful; some of the finest lower french male voices possible to get from van Dam, Bacquier and Quilico. Everyone may not like the oldfashioned timbre of Margarita Zimmerman as Mab, but she's effective and hers is a minor role.

So, the weak parts, if anything, is Prêtre's conducting that is not perfect, not in tempi, nor in style - but it's good enough and with such singers to help him this is really good. If you like Bizet, this probably won't disappoint you, it has all his trademarks of captivating rhytms, unbelievable beauty and lyricism, exotism. Though no Carmen, 'La Jolie fille' might well rank aside 'les pecheurs' if performed under perfect conditions. A must for Bizet lovers. --- Mr JB, amazon.com

La jolie fille de Perth (The Fair Maid of Perth) is an opera in four acts by Georges Bizet (1838–1875), from a libretto by Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges and Jules Adenis, after the novel by Sir Walter Scott. Many writers have reserved severe criticism for the librettists for their stock devices and improbable events, while praising Bizet's advance on his earlier operas in construction of set pieces and his striking melodic and instrumental ideas.

It was first performed at the Théâtre Lyrique (Théâtre-Lyrique Impérial du Châtelet), Paris, on 26 December 1867. Although commissioned by Carvalho in 1866 and completed by Bizet by the end of that year (with the soprano lead intended for Christine Nilsson), the dress rehearsal took place in September 1867 and the first performance three months later. It was next revived in Paris on 3 November 1890 at the Éden-Théâtre for eleven performances.

La jolie fille de Perth was performed in Brussels in 1868 and Geneva in 1885; in German it was given in Weimar and Vienna in 1883, and in English in Manchester and London in 1917. It was staged at the Wexford Festival in 1968, the Théâtre Impérial de Compiègne in 1998 and the Buxton Festival in 2006, and recorded by the BBC in Manchester for the Bizet centenary in 1975.

Synopsis

Place: Perth Time: 14th century

Act 1

The workshop of Henry Smith the armourer

Workmen sing in the forge, on the eve of the Carnival. Alone, Smith muses on whether the coquettish Catherine Glover will consent to be his Valentine. Mab, Queen of the Gypsies enters hurriedly, seeking refuge in Smith's workshop from pursuing noblemen. When Catherine arrives unexpectedly, she hides in an adjoining room. Catherine, her father the glove-maker and his apprentice Ralph enter. Catherine sings of the joys of winter, and the two men retire to leave her and Smith alone. Smith gives his beloved a rose brooch in advance of St Valentine's Day. However, a stranger now enters and asks Smith to straighten the blade of his dagger. He is the Duke of Rothsay, who proceeds to flirt with Catherine, infuriating Smith, who is about to land a blow on the Duke when Mab comes from her hiding-place to protect him. Glover returns to a scene of confusion; Catherine throws away the rose, but Mab picks it up in order to return it

later.

Act 2

A square in Perth

Later that evening the watch, including Glover, are on their rounds. They are scared off by revellers, who gather beneath Catherine's window. Mab joins them and dances. The Duke asks her to bring Catherine, masked, to a ball at his palace that night. Although Mab initially laughs at the Duke's fickleness, she agrees, but swears vengeance. As the stage empties, Smith enters and serenades his sweetheart, unsuccessfully. As midnight strikes, Ralph enters, drunk and in despair at not being loved. As the Duke's steward asks him where Catherine Glover lives, a lady like her gets into a litter and is driven away. Coming to his senses, Ralph sends Smith after the litter; when the real Catherine deigns to reply to her lover's serenade he is gone.

Act 3

Night-time festivities at the Duke's palace.

The Duke to his friends that his latest conquest will shortly arrive and a masked lady appears, but will only unmask for him. Alone together, Mab removes her domino, then flees, leaving her lover only Catherine's enamelled rose she had been wearing on her bodice. Next Smith arrives to a deserted ballroom, lamenting Catherine's infidelity. Soon it is morning, and time for the Duke's audience. While Smith hides, the Duke receives Glover, who invites him to his daughter's approaching wedding. The Duke is surprised, and Smith bursts in and accuses Catherine of betrayal. She protests, and he forgives her, but then notices that the Dukes has her enamelled rose, confirmed all his suspicions.

Act 4

1st tableau - a wild spot

A few hours later; Smith is seated by a tree, his head in his hands. Ralph and some artisans try to convince Smith of Catherine's innocence. Ralph agrees to meet Smith in a duel to decide her honour. Catherine now comes on the scene and Smith says he will allow himself to be killed to restore her honour to her.

2nd tableau - the main square in Perth

Mab comes to let Catherine know that the Duke intervened to prevent the duel between Smith and Ralph. However, Glover informs Mab that his daughter has lost her mind - Catherine appears and sings a distracted ballad. To shock her back to her senses, Mab decides to appear at her window and sing a reply to Smith's serenade. Catherine regains herself, swoons in the arms of Smith, and revives believing that it was all a dream, and all prepare for a joyous St Valentine's Day.

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