

Giacomo Meyerbeer - Il Crociato in Egitto [2010]

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Disc 1 1. Act I Scene 1: Patria amata! (Chorus of Slaves, 2 Slaves) 00:10:19 2. Act I Scene 1: I doni d'Elmireno (Palmide, Chorus of Slaves, Osmينو, Aladino) 00:09:04 3. Act I Scene 1: Ah! si: tutti i miei voti (Aladino, Palmide, Osmينو) 00:02:07 4. Act I Scene 1: Urridi vezzose (Chorus of Favourites) 00:04:28 5. Act I Scene 2: Cessi, o miei fidi, la sorpresa (Armando) 00:04:16 6. Act I Scene 2: E Palmide! ... ella sola or manca (Armando, Palmide) 00:04:29 7. Act I Scene 2: Ah! non ti son piu cara (Palmide, Armando) 00:07:43 8. Act I Scene 3: Vedi il legno, che al cielo vivente (Chorus of People, Felicia) 00:03:36 9. Act I Scene 3: Popoli dell'Egitto (Felicia) 00:00:51 10. Act I Scene 3: Pace io reco, a noi piu grata (Felicia, Chorus of People) 00:04:19 11. Act I Scene 3: Ah! piu sorridere, labbro d'amore (Felicia, Chorus of People) 00:03:33 12. Act I Scene 3: Tu, degli illustri cavalier di Rodi (Osmينو, Felicia) 00:00:20 13. Act I Scene 4: Tutto d'intorno tace omai (Adriano) 00:02:57 14. Act I Scene 4: L'angustia mia, questa smania (Armando, Adriano) 00:02:46 15. Act I Scene 4: Va' gia varcasti, indegno (Adriano, Armando) 00:04:42 16. Act I Scene 4: Non sai quale incanto (Armando, Adriano) 00:07:42

Disc 2 1. Act I Scene 5: Quai rimembranze amare (Felicia, Alma, Palmide) 00:00:39 2. Act I Scene 5: D'Armando Orville! ... (Palmide, Felicia) 00:03:56 3. Act I Scene 5: Giovinetto Cavalier (Felicia, Palmide, Armando) 00:12:18 4. Act I Scene 5: Armando! ... Armando! ... (Palmide, Felicia, Alma, Armando) 00:01:53 5. Act I Scene 6: Gran profeta, ognor dal ciel (Chorus of Imams, Chorus of Knights) 00:05:08 6. Act I Scene 6: Invitto, illustre gran maestro (Aladino, Adriano, Felicia, Palmide, Armando, Osmينو) 00:07:57 7. Act I Scene 6: Sogni, e ridenti di pace (Armando, Palmide, Felicia, Adriano, Aladino, Osmينو) 00:05:02 8. Act I Scene 6: Ite, superbi (Aladino, Felicia, Adriano, Osmينو, Chorus of Imams, Armando) 00:07:08 9. Act II Scene 1: Ove, incauta, m'inoltro ... (Felicia) 00:01:41 10. Act II Scene 1: Ah! ch'io l'adoro ancor (Felicia, Osmينو, Chorus of Emirs) 00:04:51 11. Act II Scene 1: Come dolce a lusingarmi (Felicia, Osmينو, Chorus of Emirs) 00:03:53 12. Act II Scene 2: Aria: O solinghi recessi! (Palmide) 00:02:25 13. Act II Scene 2: Tutto qui parla ognor (Palmide) 00:03:53 14. Act II Scene 2: Ma ciel! ... s'ei mai peri! (Palmide, Alma, Osmينو, Aladino) 00:02:17 15. Act II Scene 2: D'una madre disperata (Palmide) 00:04:58 16. Act II Scene 2: A suoi pie, ai suoi pianti (Chorus of Emirs, Aladino, Palmide) 00:03:58

Disc 3 1. Act II Scene 2: A che mi chiami (Adriano, Aladino, Armando, Palmide) 00:03:03 2. Act II Scene 3: In sen del nostro possente nume (Armando, Palmide, Adriano, Felicia) 00:04:11 3. Act II Scene 3: O Cielo clemente (Armando, Palmide, Adriano, Felicia) 00:07:15 4. Act II Scene 3: Che miro Oh cielo! (Aladino, Palmide, Armando, Adriano, Felicia, Osmينو, Chorus of Emirs, Chorus of Guards) 00:03:08 5. Act II Scene 3: Ah! questo e l'ultimo, crudele addio (Palmide, Armando,

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Adriano, Chorus of Emirs, Felicia, Aladino, Osmino) 00:03:50 6. *Act II Scene 3: Aladin, troppo ardente (Osmino)* 00:00:52 7. *Act II Scene 4: Tutto e finito. E ancor pochi istanti (Adriano, Chorus of Knights)* 00:07:45 8. *Act II Scene 4: Suona funerea l'ora di morte (Adriano, Chorus of Knights)* 00:04:12 9. *Act II Scene 4: Guidati sian que' perfidi (Aladino, Adriano, Chorus of Knights)* 00:00:53 10. *Act II Scene 4: L'acciar della fede ai prodi si chiede (Adriano, Chorus of Emirs, Chorus of Guards, Chorus of Knights, Aladino, Osmino)* 00:03:50 11. *Act II Scene 4: O tu, divina fe de' padri miei (Armando)* 00:03:25 12. *Act II Scene 4: Il di rinascerà (Armando)* 00:02:52 13. *Act II Scene 4: Sollecita, pietosa or tronchi morte (Armando, Felicia)* 00:03:12 14. *Act II Scene 4: Con noi qual alto arcano!... (Chorus of Knights, Chorus of Saracens)* 00:00:35 15. *Act II Scene 4: Primiero sul tiranno io piombiero (Osmino, Adriano, Aladino, Chorus of Knights)* 00:01:47 16. *Act II Scene 4: Ah! che fate! v'arrestate (Armando, Osmino, Chorus of Emirs, Adriano, Aladino, Chorus of Knights)* 00:01:04 17. *Act II Scene 4: Rapito io sento il cor a tanto mio piacer... (Armando, Chorus of Knights)* 00:04:25 18. *Act II Scene 4: Verrai meco di Provenza (Armando, Chorus of Knights)* 00:02:42

Total Playing Time: 03:24:10 Armando d'Orville – Michael Maniaci, Countertenor Palmide – Patrizia Ciofi, Soprano Aladino – Marco Vinco, Bass Osmino – Iorio Zennaro, Tenor Alma – Silvia Pasini, Mezzo–soprano Adriano di Monfort – Fernando Portari, Tenor Felicia – Laura Polverelli, Mezzo–soprano Primo schiavo – Luca Favaron, Tenor Secondo schiavo – Emanuele Pedrini, Bass Orchestra e Coro del Teatro La Fenice di Venezia Emmanuel Villaume (conductor) Teatro La Fenice, Venice 16 January 2007

“Meyerbeer created his operas not as Delacroix painted a battle or tragic death-scene; rather he made them as a vast, elaborate woven tapestry—showered with detail and colour—the result of years of painstaking work.”

The reputation that Giacomo Meyerbeer has enjoyed since the beginning of the twentieth century is surely that of a meritorious, but deeply old-fashioned, composer, whose works suited the taste of his own day but have little place in opera houses of more recent times. Meyerbeer is remembered as a maker of operas on a grand scale; yet his output during a long career was only seventeen stage works, of which just six remain familiar (by name alone) to most music-lovers, and not all of which are indeed that grand. Such was the impact that several of them made during his lifetime that it is both surprising and regrettable that they are not better known and admired in the 21st century.

This landmark recording of Meyerbeer's *Il crociato in Egitto* was made during a performance at the Teatro La Fenice, Venice in January 2007. That production, directed and designed by Pier Luigi Pizzi, was the first anywhere for well over a hundred years and thus this recording offer a welcome opportunity for a reassessment of one of nineteenth-century opera's long-forgotten,

major masterpieces. *Il crociato* was composed at the close of Meyerbeer's 'Italian' phase, a transitional stylistic period, shortly before he embarked upon his triumphant 'French' career.

Born Jakob Beer on 5 September 1791 in Tasdorf, near Berlin, the young prodigy changed his name to Meyerbeer at the age of nineteen, by which time he had already achieved recognition through several notable piano and orchestral compositions. His preference for the forename Giacomo reflected his love of Italian music, fostered during lengthy visits to Italy in his mid-twenties.

With the good fortune of being born into a prosperous Jewish family, Jakob received a musical education and sound advice from some of the most distinguished performers and academics of the day; he could hardly have hoped for better. Franz Lauska, his first teacher, had links with the Prussian Royal House and under his guidance Jakob gave his first public piano recital. He studied for a while with the composer Muzio Clementi, continued with Carl Zelter (two of whose later pupils were Felix Mendelssohn and Otto Nicolai) and knew Antonio Salieri in Berlin. An introduction to Abbé Vogler (Carl Maria von Weber's teacher) took him to Darmstadt, where he worked and socialised with other young composers and developed an interest in writing for the opera stage. With this valuable experience behind him, Jakob travelled with unceasing energy throughout Germany and Austria (and once to London), continuing to compose and achieving performances of two early operas, *Jephtas Gelübde* and *Wirth und Gast*, albeit with mixed results. During this time he also created works in other genres, including songs, instrumental music and oratorios, for which he earned considerable acclaim.

A period in Paris was followed by his formative tours of Italy, when he came to know and admire (and, in the opinion of some contemporaries, to copy) the works of Rossini, almost his exact coeval. In 1817—and by now fully fledged as Giacomo Meyerbeer—his first Italian opera, *Romilda e Costanza*, was performed in Padua. This enjoyed the appreciable asset of a libretto by Gaetano Rossi. During a long career, Rossi produced over 120 texts for many Italian composers, including five for Meyerbeer himself, and during the next few years his collaboration undoubtedly contributed significantly to the success of Meyerbeer's *Semiramide riconosciuta* (1819 in Turin), *Emma di Resburgo* (1819, Venice) and *Margherita d'Anjou* (1820, Milan).

Italy had clearly taken Meyerbeer to its heart, to such an extent that one of the country's most famous theatres, La Fenice in Venice, commissioned a new opera from him for production during the city's Carnival season of 1824. *Il crociato in Egitto* (*The Crusader in Egypt*) was an extraordinary triumph and before many months had passed it was presented in several other Italian cities. The first London performance was given at His Majesty's Theatre in June 1825 and just three months later its Paris première, at the Théâtre Italien, paved the way for the

remainder of Meyerbeer's career, and his immensely influential output of six grand and comic operas in French. Over the next few years *Il crociato* was presented in the Americas, in Turkey and throughout Europe with consistent success.

With his career then centred in Paris, (apart from a short break when he returned to Berlin to take up a Court appointment), Meyerbeer composed successively *Robert le diable* (1831), *Les Huguenots* (1836), *Le prophète* (1849), *L'étoile du nord* (1854), *Dinorah* (1859) and, finally, *L'Africaine*, first performed at the Opéra in 1865, almost a year after the composer's death.

As well as being known for this handful of French operas, Meyerbeer is less happily remembered as the target of lashing criticism from Richard Wagner, which began around 1850 and continued long after Meyerbeer's death. This burning acrimony was apparently ignited by a mixture of professional jealousy and racial hatred, and seems particularly unpleasant in view of the support that Meyerbeer had given the younger composer a number of years earlier. How far the later decline in Meyerbeer's reputation can be attributed to Wagner's vitriol is difficult to assess but, nevertheless, decline it did; he surely remains the best-remembered forgotten composer of the nineteenth century.

When preparing his text for *Il crociato in Egitto*, Gaetano Rossi loosely based his libretto on a recently published play by Jean-Antoine-Marie Monperlier, *Les Chevaliers de Malte* (The Knights of Malta), set during the sixth crusade. The opera tells the story of the love of Palmide and Elmireno (otherwise known as Armando d'Orville), their child Mirva, of Armando's duplicity, of the thwarted but ever-loyal Felicia, of the Knights of Rhodes and the religious tensions between the leading groups of characters, Christian and Muslim. The opera has one special claim to fame, being the last major work composed for a castrato, in this case the celebrated Giovanni Velluti who sang not only at the Venice première, but also in its first London performances; so taken was Velluti with the English capital that for a while he became manager of the King's Theatre and returned to the city to sing several times, even after that administrative venture failed. Other principals in the first Venice performances were the French dramatic soprano Henriette Méric-Lalande, (who also created rôles for Bellini and Donizetti); mezzo Brigida Lorenzani; the ageing tenor Gaetano Crivelli, and Luciano Bianchi, one of Rossini's preferred baritones.

When *Il crociato* was presented in Paris, however, the rôle of Armando was taken by the adored soprano Giuditta Pasta and Meyerbeer composed new music for her performances, to replace some of the original numbers. This led to the loss of several solos and ensembles and was followed by further changes for other productions in Italy and elsewhere. Meyerbeer adapted his scores as necessary—sometimes unwillingly—as his chosen singers were replaced by less

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satisfactory substitutes at the behest of local management. Such complexity makes analysis of early performances something of a challenge. On the present recording the rôle of Armando/Elmireno is taken by the American male soprano Michael Maniaci, whose timbre and extraordinary vocal agility surely convey something of the qualities of Velluti's voice. To 21st century ears the unfamiliarity of such a sound can still sound strange, differing as it does from the better known countertenor voice, but Maniaci makes a convincing case for casting a male singer in this rôle, however beautifully Pasta, and later sopranos, may have performed it.

Almost two hundred years after its first performance, *Il crociato in Egitto* still inspires admiration, truly a 'woven tapestry showered with detail and colour', so different in scale from anything that had previously been composed. Meyerbeer led the way for an entirely new nineteenth-century operatic style which many others followed—and are better remembered. Putting it in context, it is worth recalling that in the year of its première Rossini had all but ended his career as an operatic composer; Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was two years away and Bellini's first opera had yet to be staged. Berlioz's first opera was still ten years in the future and Verdi and Wagner were not yet teenagers.

The edition of *Il crociato*, prepared by Franco Rossi and Carlo Steno Rossi for the 2007 performances, omits some short sections of recitative and slightly reduces other scenes but, for the most part, retains the original version composed for La Fenice in 1824, thus giving a true sense of the original production. It is fitting that this timely new recording should have been made in the very theatre for which Meyerbeer conceived the opera and first saw it performed to such acclaim.

Il crociato in Egitto was first performed at the Teatro la Fenice, Venice on 7 March 1824. ---Paul Champion, naxos.com

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