

Giuseppe Verdi - Giovanna d'Arco (2015)



1. *Giovanna d'Arco (Jeanne d'Arc)* 2:01:41 Francesco Meli (Carlo VII) Anna Netrebko (Giovanna) Devid Cecconi (Giacomo) Dmitry Beloselskyi - (Talbot) Michele Mauro (Delil) Coro e Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala Riccardo Chailly - conductor 07 December 2015, La Scala de Milan

Verdi chose another Schiller play as a basis for this opera, and like most Schiller plays, *The Maid of Orleans* is almost 100 percent free of historical fact. However, for Verdi, as for Schiller, the figure of a woman leading her oppressed country to freedom contained enough dramatic truth to make up for any lack of historical accuracy. In Verdi's hands, the story was made into yet another rallying cry for Italian independence in a unified kingdom. The music reflects this in its stirring ensembles and Giovanna's (Joan's) moving music as she prays for the strength needed to save France.

Giovanna is a shepherdess who has visions of forcing the invading English out of France, at the point when Carlo (Charles), the king, is ready to surrender, in order to stop the endless deaths the war is causing. Giovanna's visions and a dream Carlo has lead them to meet, and she tells him she will lead his armies to victory. However, she is troubled by the heavenly message that if she yields to earthly love, she will be destroyed. Her father, however, suspects her of witchcraft.

She has led the army to victory, and Carlo is about to be crowned, except that the two have fallen in love. She finally yields to Carlo's pleading, but is deeply upset when she hears the angel voices again warning her against earthly love. When her father denounces her for what he believes to be her witchery, she is so distraught by her guilty feelings that she follows him to be taken prisoner and killed by the English. In the last act, when her father overhears her praying, he realizes she is innocent, and frees her to rejoin the fighting. However, she is mortally wounded, and dies after the battle is won.

The opera has many thrilling moments as well as many of musical beauty. Carlo's aria in the last act as he mourns Giovanna's impending death is deeply moving and has a hint of Otello's music as he mourns Desdemona. The duet for Carlo and Giovanna as she admits her love for him is lovely, and the contrast of his sensual phrases about love and her perturbation as she hears the angelic voices is particularly effective. The first-act trio for Giovanna, Carlo, and her father is an excellent example of a cappella composition, as well. But what is perhaps most impressive in the opera is the spirit Verdi infused it with, as yet another one of his expressions of the ideals of freedom. ---Anne Feeney, Rovi

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